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“BY YOUR LEAVE, SIR”

The Story of a Wave

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BOOKS BY HELEN HULL JACOBS

MODERN TENNIS

BEYOND THE GAME

IMPROVE YOUR TENNIS

BARRY CORT

TENNIS

"BY YOUR LEAVE, SIR"

The Story of a Wave

By

LIEUTENANT (J.G.) HELEN HULL JACOBS,
U.S.N.R.



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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO THOSE INCOMPARABLE
DAYS OF TRAINING AND ALL WHO WERE A PART OF
THEM AT THE NAVAL RESERVE MIDSHIPMEN'S SCHOOL,
NORTHAMPTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

PREFACE

WHEN HELEN JACOBS joined the Navy, she wondered, as I suppose most of us did, if she had done the right thing. She had joined because of a strong desire to "do something" and after she had taken this step in doing something, she paused to ask herself if it were the best one. This shadow of doubt showed the day she arrived in Northampton, ready to begin her training there. She discovered that training to be an officer is no skylark, but a stiff, rigorous two or three months of absorbing everything possible to fit a woman for service in the Navy. Several days after Helen had arrived, it was apparent that her doubt had vanished. She found, as we all did, that there was a big job for women in the Navy to do. She found a spirit of pride and determination, and she discovered that that same spirit was welling within her. All of us have this feeling, and I know that it has won us the respect and confidence of those with whom we have worked.

When new recruits arrive in Northampton, we tell them that all during their Navy career they must remember five things. They must remember that the Navy has a long tradition of courage, valor and hard work and that the women in the Navy must live up to that tradition. They must never forget their pride in the Navy. Before them always must be a goal of perfection, and everything they do must be aimed at that goal. They are in training to learn how to relieve a

man of shore duty, and thus help to win the war. And they must remember that to do their jobs well they must have faith in themselves, faith in the Navy and faith in the United States of America.

This war has brought about the first stirrings of patriotic feeling for many of us. In the nineteen-twenties and thirties when most of us in the Waves were growing up, it was the habit, perhaps the fashion, to assume a very casual attitude about our being citizens of the U. S. A. The war changed this. It made us conscious and proud of America and determined to fight for it.

And it is because of that pride and determination that women join the Navy. As each girl takes her oath admitting her to the Navy, she is impelled by a strong will to do her utmost, to devote herself completely and unselfishly to the task which confronts her. She knows and accepts the fact that as long as she is a member of the Navy, the feminine privileges of vanity and frivolity are denied her. No longer may she follow her whimsical desires of the moment. For twenty-four hours a day, as long as she is a member of the Navy, her energy and will are steadfastly devoted to the tasks before her. Her life, in truth, is dedicated to the proposition that "government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from this earth."

Men and women in all branches of the war effort are learning to sacrifice personal interests for national

good. Surely this discipline of minds, this unity of purpose will breed a nation of strong people. We are now face to face with the forgotten truth that out of national welfare comes private happiness.

These are the things that we in the Women's Reserve of the Navy are learning. For the America of the present, we are doing shore jobs now and doing them well. For the America of the future, we are learning the rudiments of citizenship. The Navy has taught us that a ship is as good as its crew, and conversely, that the crew's happiness depends upon the efficiency of the ship. We are learning that government of, by and for the people is not a gift—a silver spoon put in our mouths at birth—but an obligation which demands thought, action and work. When the war is won, we will go back to our homes strong in the knowledge that a nation can be vigorous only if its citizens play an active and intelligent part in its life.

Every man and woman who is now throwing all of his effort into winning the war is learning these same truths. Some of us are in foxholes, some in factories, some at desks, some on a tumultuous ocean, but all of us raise our eyes to look in the same direction—toward freedom and peace.

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1

BECKY McLEOD looked at the young man sitting opposite her with a certain amount of detached curiosity. She would have liked having eyes the color of his—pure blue against skin mahogany tanned by a hot African sun—instead of her own, gray-green, neither one nor the other, forever provoking argument among her friends. But then she could hardly expect to have eyes like Ronnie's unless hers had seen the things his had and, when she thought of Dunkirk and Tobruk, she wasn't very sure that she would have liked to see those things.

It was certainly true that, in retrospect, they were exciting things to tell one's grandchildren when piping voices demanded, "Tell me about the War." You would be off, magnifying realities that couldn't be magnified; making small voices laugh at the humor of men who had the courage to joke in the face of quick

death. Telling of endless, pressing human beings clambering into any kind of boat that would take them to England's shores and a chance to fight again; of men whose hopes were knocked into a cocked hat by the staggering odds against an African fort.

No, one wouldn't tell those things to children. Becky could see that, looking at the tight lines of Ronnie's mouth, even when he was trying so hard to be gay. He had always had strong, mobile lines to his face. Now they were taut and weary, without the sudden, amused relaxation that creased the corners of his eyes. He could still meet her eyes calmly, but when he did, they held the old question more intensely. And when he spoke, it was as if he spoke out of a dream that had been dreamt long ago, when all they had thought about during spring in England was themselves and the loveliness of the countryside—azure blue skies, bullfinch hedges, the first delphinium blooms and green everywhere—fields, trees, the Downs——

"When the worst of this war is over, I'm not going to give you a chance to hesitate," he said.

She let her hand steal under the table and across to his. A wonderful place, the Queen's restaurant. So conservative, so quiet, so full of memories of their first meeting. She had always loved the sound of Sloane Square. It meant Ronnie and a bitter cold evening when she hadn't wanted to go out. The persuasive voice of a friend. "We won't keep you out late. But

there's someone very special for you to meet. I think he needs a bit of American humor to cheer him."

How maddening that had been, as if her being American and possessed of normal American humor were the only qualifications she possessed certain to entertain a weary English soldier. She had gone to Queen's with misgivings. A dismal, malodorous taxi had lurched to a halt, decanted her and crept off. She had walked in from the moonlit street to the dim alleyway of tables, and had seen him standing between the two small Victorian dining rooms. She knew it was he before she had seen her own friends standing beside him. He had looked tired, resigned to an evening he couldn't escape. When their eyes met, she had forgotten that she had been standing in a canteen for eighteen hours, serving men as tired as he. And they had never looked back from that day.

"I don't think I'll want to hesitate, Ronnie. I think Mother knows and I believe she's really pleased, even though——"

"Even though what?" She liked the belligerent look in his face.

"Oh, you know. She doesn't think anyone knows what she wants until she's pushing thirty."

"That may have been true in her day, but we live a lifetime in a week now, Becky."

"Yes," she said quietly, "we do."

"Do you think you'll feel the same—after months?"

He studied her face minutely. Somehow he always made her conscious of the thin, faint scar, relic of a childhood accident, that drew her left brow a shade lower than her right. He insisted it was the first thing about her that intrigued him. "When I'm sure I know what you're thinking, that eye makes a liar out of me. I love it!" He had said it so often, she believed him, though when she looked at it herself in the mirror, she could only see that it made her seem to be forever asking a question.

"I'm sure we will feel the same," she told him.

"Well I've only got a week to blast your illusions. When I think what a lifetime that is in the air!"

She slid her hand from his and sipped the last of her coffee. "Mother wants to go home."

"I've been afraid of that."

"It's gotten on her nerves. You can't blame her, Ronnie. You know how awful it was the other night. She lay on the living-room floor four hours. The one that landed in the King's Road nearly finished her. She swears if she hears another bomb explode, she'll go stark crazy."

"Well, what are you going to do—how soon?"

"Apparently we are leaving at the very minute she can bulldoze any of father's friends into getting space on a plane. She's telephoned or wired everyone with a name he ever knew in England. It really is unlike her,

Ronnie, to be so frantic. But she has had a long siege. After all, we came here in 1939 for a pleasant and restful year and look what we got! Sometimes when I think of what we went through on the fourth of July, it makes me laugh. Mother never would let us shoot off firecrackers! Of course, we'll wait and wait, the way everyone else does, and suddenly word will come and we'll have fifteen minutes to pack and get to the air field."

He folded his arms on the table and leaned toward her. "Why didn't you tell me this before? You know what it means—how much chance there is that I'll see you before the war's over."

"I'm coming back, Ronnie, after I take her home——"

She saw his jaws go tight and his eyes harden unsympathetically. "You mean you think you are. Do you imagine that they're running a junket across the Atlantic for young ladies who are loved by Englishmen with honorable intentions?"

In spite of herself, she bridled. "I don't think that's the only useful thing I've done here."

He nodded. "I know that, Becky. I've seen those canteens. They're no joke. But you won't convince the Embassy in Washington that there isn't anyone in England to take your place. You'll be at the end of a list a thousand miles long. I'm not taking any chances!

Will you promise me to stay here, or shall I go straight to the Consulate and give them a dossier on you that will put you in chains for the duration?"

"What would you tell them?" Her eyes challenged him.

"That you are a vicious blonde with a lovely nose, a smile that would make a Jerry forget Hitler, eyes that flash a stop-and-go signal at the same time—a dangerous woman with spy potentialities."

She laughed and realized that he wanted her to laugh and be gay with him. He always said that when he saw the first sign of a smile he was sure he had won ninety per cent of the argument. "Shall we talk about it on the way home?" she suggested.

"You think you ought to go?"

She nodded. "You know where mother will be? Under the stairway with the stirrup-pump."

He shrugged his shoulders and got up to help her on with her coat. For a moment his hands closed tightly on her arms, and then they walked out into the frosty night.

She buttoned her uniform coat tight around her throat and took a deep breath. "Let's walk, Ronnie. The air is so good."

He slipped his arm through hers. "Will you try to stay? Will you give your mother one of those super arguments I can never think of an answer to?"

"You know I would, Ronnie, if I thought it were

right. It wouldn't make either of us happy if I did something I'd blame both of us for afterwards. I'll get back here, if I have to swim. I don't think I could bear being away from you—not even to be home on my farm—and you know how I feel about that——"

He swung around to face her. "You mean it?"

In the moonlight he saw her nod. The depths of her heart, clear in her eyes, made his pulse race wildly. For a moment they stood still, facing each other, all the longing of months written for each to see. Then, without a word they walked on slowly.

It was a crazy, unearthly wail that the sirens made—like the rise and fall of a banshee's voice on a bleak Scottish moor. Becky felt her heart tighten as Ronnie's grip clamped hard on her arm. The throbbing of her temples drowned his voice, but she followed his quickened pace until he turned toward an air-raid shelter. Then she pulled against him.

"I've got to get back to the flat." He followed her as she began to run.

"Don't be a fool, Becky!"

"I can't leave Mother alone again——"

His voice rose against the siren and then their eyes lifted at the concerted roar of motors and the sweeping beams of searchlights. He cried against the noise. "I'll go on to her. For God's sake get into the shelter!"

She was running hard and shaking her head. It was

so far—so far, and the first hideous blast had come, shaking the ground beneath her feet, deafening her. It was too close. The next one would be closer. She knew the look of fear that would be on her mother's face. To be alone in a raid, uncertain of what to do—how well she knew that feeling.

The familiar whining overhead, Ronnie pulling her into the shelter of a doorway, were all she remembered for a long while. Pressed close to the wall, they held their breath, clinging together like small children caught in the darkness of an unknown place. The sky flared up with a yellow light and what had been the stillness of a May night was shattered by the thunder and trembling of devastation. It seemed an age before he spoke.

"Don't be frightened, Becky. I think it's come as near us as it's going to."

"I'm not afraid for myself," she cried in a voice that was strange to him, and pulling loose from his arms, ran into the street.

He followed after her. Somewhere on Cheyne Walk a bomb ripped the heavens and earth apart. Neither heard anything but a sound like the end of the world and then the crash of falling masonry and the sight of walls tumbling slowly, crazily.

She lay very still. It was strange that she wasn't afraid any longer. All that was going to happen to her had happened. Her legs hurt, worse than anything had ever hurt in her life, but she could hear a scraping and faint voices. It wouldn't be long. They would get to her, move this terrible weight. Ronnie would make them hurry. He would be waiting to help her. Her hand flew to her mouth, stifled a cry. Ronnie was caught in it, just the way she had been. He wouldn't be waiting because he would be pinned, as she was, beneath splintered beams, bricks and deep piles of rubble. There might not even be the little protected space for his head that there was for hers. She was shocked by the sound of her own voice crying back against her and then a dizzying storm of blackness blotted out everything.

2

"THE McLEODS have never given up easily, Becky." Mrs. McLeod faced her daughter with the well-worn dictum, and then looked a little discomfited. "I admit that it's my fault we're back in Kentucky. I was frightened." She hurried on. "It was that hideous sound of the bombs—I kept thinking of Ronnie being killed. It might so easily have been you, too."

Becky glanced at her legs with a slow frown. Scars showed broad and red through her stockings. She was lucky that scars were all she had got that night; that was, all that showed. If a McLeod had given up, at least they could still claim to be a strong family. When she thought of it, which she tried never to do, she wondered how they had ever dug her out of that mountain of ruins alive. It must have been like playing jackstraws. She remembered only one thing when she finally opened her eyes on the Thames Embankment and saw,

in the light of a mounting inferno, what they had taken her from—it was the sight of a single chimney balancing precariously within the skeleton of a house.

Becky rose from her chair and moved to the window. A riverboat pushed its blunt prow up the Ohio, leaving a broad wake churned by the paddle wheel. The soft hoot of its whistle caressed the banks. It was a peaceful, leisurely thing to look at. She had watched for it from the time she was old enough to walk to the highest field above the river. She looked away from it now, impatiently. All these things meant to her were Ronnie; the countless things they were to have seen together.

"Becky, if you don't stop being so preoccupied I simply can't talk to you."

Becky went back to her chair, sank into it listlessly. "I'm sorry, Mother. What were you saying?"

"That the McLeods never give up easily."

"You mean that I ought to resign myself to Ronnie's death and forget there's a war on."

Mrs. McLeod bristled. "Not at all. Don't you think I know there's a war on? After all, I went through it, too."

"Yes, I know you did."

During the silence that followed, Mrs. McLeod studied her daughter's face. What she saw there made her speak more gently, almost apologetically. "You can't go on thinking about it all the time, Becky. You've

got to do something that will take your mind off it. I did the same thing at first when your father died. Then I moved here to our farm and tried to run it—and failed. Perhaps you can run it. Would you like to try?"

Becky smiled at the thought of Olsen's reaction to another woman running "his farm." He had been indulgent about Mrs. McLeod's efforts because he had known they would not last long and, having thought more of Martin McLeod than any man he knew, he had felt that he was doing what "the boss" would have wanted. He knew his own ground as tenant farmer was solid beneath his large feet and he had always managed to persevere indirectly in getting things done his way.

Becky knew that Olsen liked her in his own unbending fashion. Sudden thrusts of dry humor at her expense had convinced her long ago, when she discovered that he had a way of being civil but glum with people he didn't put any stock in.

Perhaps they could raise hemp together. She had been on the farm long enough to know how badly it was needed. After London, anything as peaceful as farming did not seem much of a war effort. But that, she supposed, was taking a selfish view. She knew what she wanted—to be in the thick of it all, to be back in the canteen, talking to men whose scars of war were fresh and who had gotten used to depending on her humor and encouragement. Falling into bed exhausted

in the small hours of the morning, she had felt close to them and the whole broad struggle. They were men like Ronnie. What she had done for them, she had done for him and the things they all believed.

She had forgotten the people who farmed in England to keep the stomach the army marched on reasonably satisfied; to make canteens possible. She had very nearly forgotten it here, too. She stood up.

"I think I will try. I'll talk to Olsen."

Her mother gave her an uncertain smile. "Then I can turn everything over to you?"

"Well, you can turn it over, darling. I don't know what will happen to it."

In a burst of sudden gratitude that Becky suspected was an emotional washing of her hands, Mrs. McLeod came over and put her arms around her daughter and seemed reluctant to relax a fierce embrace. For a long time her face pressed close to the high contour of Becky's cheek. The muscles began to quiver and in a moment hot tears seeped between their faces.

Becky started to speak the soft, comforting things she knew she should say, but somehow she couldn't. It was unlike her mother to cry. She wasn't sure what she was crying about. They had sustained each other through a good many hard times by their outward shunning of emotion. Mrs. McLeod insisted Becky had inherited this trait from her. Becky insisted it went further back than that—perhaps to her dour

Scotch ancestors. Her embarrassment at any show of affection—except where Ronnie had been concerned—was too acute to have been bred in a single generation. Nearly all of her life she had been more loved than loving because of it. Ronnie, again, had been the exception. He had shattered a large part of the comfortable armor, but who else would ever sense so finely the weakness in her defense or have the indefinable qualities to pierce it?

She tightened her arm around her mother's shoulder, and waited for the tears to stop. Suddenly she wanted to say all the things that were in her heart—that the two of them could work anything out together; that they were really closer because they understood, where others talked about understanding. At last she turned until her lips brushed her mother's cheek.

Mrs. McLeod pulled a handkerchief from the sleeve of her dress and dabbed quickly at her eyes. "I'm all right, now," she said. "I'm sorry, Becky. I know you hate tears the way I do, but I suddenly realized what I'd done to you."

Becky's astonishment was in her face. She was glad that her mother turned away and went to the window, keeping her back to the room. "I don't think I've ever done anything quite so selfish before. Certainly not to you." There was a brittleness in her voice so unlike the last words she had spoken that Becky listened, half

hoping she wouldn't go on. "I don't suppose I've been as frightened before as I was in London and there have been things that I thought nearly frightened me to death. But it wasn't just fear for myself that made me insist on coming back. I've told you that before and I'm sure you didn't believe me. I was afraid of losing you, Becky. I couldn't have stood it. And yet I did tell myself that you were doing what I would have done at your age and with your spirit. If my mother had dragged me back to a farm in Kentucky after those months in London, I'd never have forgiven her. Suddenly, tonight, I wondered if you would ever forgive me."

Becky answered quietly. "I have never thought of it as something to be forgiven. I promise not to think of it that way—ever."

Her mother didn't know that Becky crossed the thick carpet and stood for a long time behind her, watching the lights of Charlestown, where men and women worked night after day in the grimness of the powder plant. Tonight Charlestown seemed symbolic of their unity and their hope. It was a little like harvesting the hemp; like her mother's determination not to lose the precious things of her life; and Ronnie's talk of the peace that was worth fighting for.

When Becky went off to her room, her mother was still standing at the window.

3

JULY AND AUGUST passed swiftly. Becky found that her mother knew as little about the business side of the farm as she did. The books were in a hopeless muddle and it took most of a month to straighten them out and begin afresh with any idea of what was needed; of what had been sold and bought. Innumerable chits from Olsen were as accurate as she might have expected, but they were scattered here and there through the drawers of her mother's desk, along with seed fertilizer and machinery catalogues.

Olsen grinned and nodded when Becky told him about her confusion and offered to let her see his accounts, kept on the grimy pages of a ten-cent notebook in a round, clear hand. It was Olsen's book that finally led her out of the jungle of crops and figures.

Freed of the desk, Becky began to ride through the

tall stands of hemp, across the alfalfa and wheat fields. Sometimes, in the blistering heat of the afternoon, she would sit her horse in the shade of the big barn and watch the mules being shod, or talk to the few men who were left to help them about the prospects of good prices for sheep and hogs.

She was discovering that the closer she got to the farm and to the actual labor and speculation that went on, the farther she was drawing away from the things that hurt. Soon, she was sure, she would be plowing the fields herself. Olsen had already given her a lesson on the tractor, but she hadn't distinguished herself. At the crest of a hill, she had gotten down to stretch legs weary from jolting and had forgotten to put on the brake. The tractor began rolling gently downward. She pursued it wildly as it gathered momentum and then could only stand breathless and watch as it splintered the plank fence and burrowed into the ditch on the far side. She was afraid to go on and look at the remains and even more ashamed to go back and report to Olsen. Then she heard him laugh, and turned around, hot with embarrassment, to see him standing at the top of the hill. It was the only time she had ever seen him give way to anything. He was doubled over, holding his sides and his bellows came down the hill strangely like the grunt of a pig.

She could still hear the echo of those bellows when she sat on the tractor, during the long, hot hours of

the next day, proving to herself and to him that there wasn't a field on the farm she couldn't plow.

* * * * *

Becky knew something momentous had happened when, glancing up from her account books, she saw Olsen walking across the alfalfa field toward the house. There was nothing of his usual ambling gait in the strides he was taking. His arms swung briskly at his side, as if to propel him more quickly across the baked earth. Finally he disappeared around the corner of the house and in a moment Nolie came from the kitchen to announce him.

"Mr. Olsen sure is excited, miss. He's grinnin' like a chessie cat and spoke right nice to me."

Becky felt a wave of relief. "If he's grinning, it can't be another filly and the pump hasn't broken down. Tell him to come in."

Only a trace of a grin remained on Olsen's deep-lined, florid face, as he clumped into the living room. It was unbelievable, Becky thought, looking at his dishevelled jeans and sweat-stained shirt, his ancient, shapeless cap crushed in his hand, to remember how tailored and pressed and close-shaven he had been when he had taken Mrs. Olsen and their brood of six in the farm car to see Carl, the eldest, off to the submarine base at New London. It was the only time she

had ever seen the whole Olsen family scrubbed pink and totally subdued.

"What's on your mind, Olsen?" she asked.

"Our hemp's the best in the county."

"It is! How do you know?" She tried to suppress a little of the spontaneous pride his news stirred up, as if she had planted every seed herself and cultivated every inch of the field.

"That government fellow said so. He wants to have a meeting on the field for the farmers around here and explain why the hemp ought to look like ours. He wants your permission and wonders if you'll be there. Thinks it might be a good thing if you are."

Becky pushed her chair back from the desk and looked up at Olsen's towering form. She could feel, in spite of her determination not to embarrass him, that a great deal of her affection for him was in her expression. It made her eternally grateful to sense his pride in the farm and to be so sure of his integrity.

"I guess we haven't done so badly, Olsen," she said.

"Better'n I expected." He rolled the cap in his hands, shedding in the house, as usual, all his self-assurance. She never had understood why he did, unless it was because he couldn't punctuate every sentence he spoke with a spurt of tobacco juice that never failed to make her wince, as well as she knew his aim was perfect.

"I'll be at the meeting. You let me know when it is."

He mumbled a reply and turned to go. She stopped him at the door. "What do you hear from Carl?"

His expression scarcely changed, but it was enough to betray his anxiety. "He's leaving New London, miss."

Becky's brows raised to question him.

"He says that means he's goin' overseas somewhere, but he doesn't know when he's goin' or where to. Couldn't say if he did."

Becky forced her eyes to meet his squarely. "Carl could always take care of himself, Olsen. You know he'll be all right. I'll bet it's just what he's been hoping for."

"Well, he says so." He shifted his feet uneasily.

Carl had always been Olsen's favorite. Perhaps, Becky thought, because he was so unlike his father: as handsome as Olsen was homely, with a smile as quick and friendly as Olsen's was slow and reluctant. The only similarity between them was height and breadth and the reddish lights in Carl's sandy hair. There was no mistaking the breeding of those farming men when they walked side by side across the fields toward home at sundown.

"He may get furlough to come home before he goes." Olsen wanted to talk about it. It was the most undemonstrative easing of the tension. "I hope he does. My old woman's been climbin' the walls."

Becky could imagine that family reunion. "If he

does, you must have a party for him, Olsen. Invite that nice girl of his from La Grange. I'll give you the chickens and we'll order ice cream and beer—whatever you'd like. Just let me know when he's coming."

Olsen looked at the broad backs of his hands and then at his boot toes. Suddenly he said, "Evening, miss," and was gone.

Becky realized, when she saw Olsen in a new pair of jeans, a clean shirt and the red stubble gone, that the hemp field meeting had turned out to be an "occasion." They walked down together from the house to the field gate. He strode along with the air of a man about to show off his first child, forcing Becky to lengthen her stride until the calves of her legs ached. He said nothing, but the lines of his deep-set mouth and jutting chin were easy and confident. He startled her once by spitting a stream of tobacco juice across her path as he turned to point toward the gathering crowd on the hillside.

Becky hadn't expected so many to come. Silhouetted against a cloud-flecked sky, men were arriving from every direction. Olsen had said all the good farmers were coming: Lowry from Skylight; the Anderson boys from Prospect; most all of the Goshen farmers. Olsen had shown them all how to raise the precious hemp.

A station wagon bumped along the crest of the rise and settled to a stop. Becky thought she recognized the

lanky figure of her neighbor, Sam Wilding. Surely no one else had such a long leg in a boot. She scarcely knew him because he had only recently come to Goshen and bought the farm adjoining theirs, but they had passed often, riding on the road. It puzzled her to see his long, athletic figure in civilian clothes, when the irreplaceable dirt farmers were being drafted every day, leaving serious gaps among the men in the county.

When Becky and Olsen joined the gathering, the county agent had already begun his demonstration. He paused briefly to thank Becky for the meeting and compliment her on the crop. But he was obviously impatient to get back to the more interesting subject of female hemp. Becky edged to the fence and perched on the top rail. Her tan twill breeches stuck to her legs in the humid air and before long she shed her white linen riding coat. Sam Wilding watched her for a long time from the far side of the crowd. His head towered above the farmers in front of him, but the strong sunlight, slanting across his lean, brown face, cut against his vision. He was trying to fix her image in his mind so that it would no longer be the quickly passing vision of a girl who sat a horse like a veteran. As she was now, was the way he wanted always to remember her. He wasn't very good at putting this into subtle terms. All he knew was that her hair, swept softly back from her face, caught the sunlight like autumn beech leaves, and that the slender

line of her throat, framed by the open neck of a blue shirt; was moulded with classic grace. Because she was wholly unaware of his attention, he could study her face with satisfying absorption. It puzzled him that features so small and delicately formed could give an impression of stubborn determination.

He detached himself inconspicuously from the crowd and skirted the circle to her side. The opportunity to talk to her, to settle such questions as the color of her eyes, the sound of her voice more extended than an abrupt "good morning," was not to be lost. He didn't give a darn about hemp, but he would talk about it, and grow it, if he had to.

When he spoke to Becky, she grabbed the top plank with both hands.

"You were snoozing!" He laughed, and something in the inflection of his voice told her that he was a Virginian. That explained his easy, sure way with his horse.

"Almost," she confessed. "I am basking in the heat of Olsen's glory."

"Not entirely," he protested. "I have seen you riding the fields with an eagle eye."

She raised one brow questioningly. He was to remember it as a familiar, well-loved expression. "Not a very intelligent eye," she admitted. "I don't know a thing about hemp."

"Nor do I," he confessed, willing to admit anything, since he had found the answer to the questions that had brought him to her side.

She didn't have to ask him why he had come. Her expression put the question bluntly.

"But I've decided to start learning," he added quickly. "It seems the most painless war effort I can imagine."

She slid slowly from the fence, feeling as unsteady on her feet as if he had struck her. He, himself, had summed up her first impression of him, but he had done something else at the same time that shocked more than her composure. He had put casually into words the doubt that she had been laboriously driving into the Kentucky soil. On an afternoon that should have justified all the effort she had put into the management of the farm, all the restless nights when nothing but her mother's peace of mind held her to the job, he had shattered the frail hope that she could ever reconcile herself to what she was doing.

When she faced him at last, he noticed for the first time the faint scar above her eye. It was a fine, white line against her flushed skin. "It's terribly hot. I think I'll go back to the house," she said.

He watched her walk away across the field, climb the fence and disappear into the wooded valley. It struck him that she moved at an angry pace. He ran his fingers across his chin and shrugged his shoulders.

"Unpredictable woman," he thought. "But she'll do for me."

* * * * *

News of Carl came in November. Becky was riding back through the valley when she saw Olsen walking up the road from his house. He was hatless, and it seemed to her from a distance that he moved unsteadily, with a slump to his big shoulders. She spurred her horse and drew up before him. Then she saw that his face was strangely pale and that he looked suddenly like an old man. The deep, flexible lines of his face were stiff.

"What's the matter, Olsen?"

He stood looking up at her for a moment without speaking. Everything he wanted to say was there in his watery blue eyes before he answered, "Carl's been killed." He handed her the communication, crumpled and soiled now. She dropped the reins and read it. Tragedy put down briefly on paper; a whole family swept from a peaceful, hard-working life on a Kentucky farm by a flood-tide of misery that had started out in the Pacific somewhere. Through the words on the page, she could see Carl coming across the field at sundown, his lunch box swinging, his strong back erect in spite of the toil of long hours.

She slid out of the saddle and put her hand on Olsen's arm. "Let's go back to your house. I'd like to

see Mrs. Olsen." She slipped her arm through the reins and led her horse. The clopping of his hooves beat against the silence that followed. At length she said. "You know how I feel about this. There's not much use my trying to tell you." She couldn't add that she was thinking of Sam Wilding, safe with his painless war effort, while men like Carl were closeted with death in the impenetrable darkness of a submarine.

* * * * *

Becky and her mother were finishing dinner. From the dining room table they could see the lights of Charlestown reflected in the river. Becky felt happier than the last time she had consciously watched the river activity. Now that she had made up her mind, all the obstacles seemed unimportant—even the fact that her mother, in a few minutes, would be as unhappy as she had been that first night, when they had spoken of Ronnie and the war.

"I'm going to join the Waves," Becky announced quietly.

Mrs. McLeod sipped the last of her coffee and put down her cup. She must remember to scold Nolie for chipping the saucer. "What did you say, dear?"

"I said I'm going to join the Waves."

Mrs. McLeod nodded and assumed an expression of deep interest, behind which Becky could see complete ignorance of the subject.

"Do you know what the Waves are, Mother?"

The smile switched to frank curiosity. "I can't say that I do, Becky. I know I ought to, but I've been so busy—has it anything to do with water?"

"A faint connection, darling. It's the Women's Reserve of the Navy."

"The Navy!"

If Becky had announced that she was going to Pago Pago, her mother couldn't have been more visibly shocked. "Oh, Becky, you can't! You simply can't. You're managing the farm so beautifully and you mustn't leave me. Anyhow," she groped wildly, "I won't have you going to sea with all those rough men."

Becky threw back her head and laughed. On occasions the throaty quality of that laugh was very irritating to Mrs. McLeod, and this was one of the occasions. She hadn't intended to be humorous. In fact, this unexpected threat made her feel quite sick.

"Mother, you don't understand," Becky told her. She could feel her mother's disapproval like the dampness of a London fog. "Waves don't go to sea."

"What *do* they do then?"

"They replace men who do go to sea."

"Oh." The response was hardly audible. Becky knew what her mother was thinking. She was so certain she had gotten safely across this hurdle—that the farm would gradually come to be as absorbing as the Lon-

don life; that, in time, even Ronnie's impelling influence might be forgotten.

Now she was just as certain that it was useless to protest. Inflexibility was in every line of Becky's face. She left no opening for argument. She had simply stated a fact, and Mrs. McLeod knew her daughter well enough to realize that nothing else but this decision would satisfy her. She supposed she ought to be glad that Becky had found the solution to the restlessness that must have been a constant torment during those months of enforced resignation. But that, she could never pretend, even to Becky. She would be miserable and, she was afraid, bewildered, without her. She had never enjoyed trying to manage the farm, but that problem would be insignificant beside the loss of Becky's companionship. It was blind stupidity, she told herself sharply, to build the pleasure and security of middle age upon one's children. But what else could one do when the sense of these things was so constant. "Accept the realities of wartime," she added to herself as a reprimand.

"When will you be going?" she asked, and Becky blessed her silently for the matter-of-factness of her tone.

"I've applied for officers' school, Mother. Perhaps they won't take me. I've no idea how hard it is to get in. I suppose I'll have to wait forever, but I wanted you to know."

"Not get in!" Mrs. McLeod rose from the table and shook the bell for Nolie. The urgency of the tinkle brought the Negress running. "More coffee in the living room," she ordered, and straightened her back as she went to her chair by the fire.

"Why didn't you tell me you were going to apply, Becky?"

"I didn't want to worry you if they turned me down flat—right at first——"

"But I don't understand. What made you decide? You've never done things impetuously like that."

Nolie brought the coffee. Becky stirred absently at hers, trying to remember the sequence of thoughts that had led to her decision. She wanted her mother to see it as she did, almost to feel as she did, if that were possible. It would be so much easier for both of them, and yet it was difficult to put into words, feelings that one sensed were right.

"One morning I picked up the paper," she said slowly, recapturing the day as she spoke. "There was a picture of a Regimental Review at Northampton, showing the color guard and Miss McAfee and Admiral Jacobs reviewing the Waves. It suddenly had great significance to me—the whole thing: the fact that women like Miss McAfee thought enough of its importance to leave the Presidency of Wellesley for it, and Admiral Jacobs—I kept feeling that his salute was

symbolic—as if it said, "Well done. Now go and relieve my men."

"Oh, Becky, you've dramatized it in your own mind! Your work here is just as important." Mrs. McLeod took a sip of coffee and burned her tongue. She put the cup down irritably. "Why is it Nolie can't remember that I don't want the coffee boiling when it's brought to the living room!"

Becky smiled. "Mother, if it's luke-warm, you get just as mad."

"Well never mind. You know perfectly well what I mean. What were we saying?"

"I've upset you," Becky said. She slid to the floor at her mother's feet. "Won't you try to understand? When I went to town to fill out my application blank, I was as sure of what I was doing as you are when you prune your rose bushes. There just wasn't any question in my mind. I can't explain it better than that."

Mrs. McLeod sighed wearily. "When will you hear whether you're accepted or not?"

"I don't know. I suppose if I don't get in, I'll never hear."

"Well, I hope you aren't going to mope about, waiting for word. If you'll just give yourself a chance to really get into the farm again—the weather will be cooler in a little while, and you know how beautiful the farm is in the late autumn."

Becky shook her head slowly. "Darling, you don't understand, do you?"

Mrs. McLeod grunted. "Sometimes you act as if your mother didn't have sense enough to come in out of the rain."

Becky sent her application to the Procurement Office at Chicago in September. It was November before a reply came, ordering her to report there a week later, for aptitude tests and physical examination.

Becky flew out of the house to find her mother, planting new Bibb lettuce slips in the cold frames.

"It's come! Look, here it is!"

Mrs. McLeod straightened up. "What's come, dear? I wish you wouldn't frighten me like that."

"I'm going to Chicago. I've gotten past the first fence."

A little of the color drained from her mother's face. "You mean the Waves have accepted you?"

"Not exactly. But at least they're going to give me the tests."

"And what's this about Chicago?"

"That's where I go for the tests."

"Do you have to go all the way up there? Can't they give them to you here? Becky, you know how badly Olsen needs you."

Becky laughed and gave her mother a peck on the

forehead. "Darling, he doesn't need me a bit now. Anyway, I'll only be gone for a couple of days."

Mrs. McLeod tilted her head and looked sharply at her daughter. "I suppose you know what you're doing."

"For once, I do, Mother."

"Well, help me finish planting this lettuce. They're wilting."

* * * * *

Becky lived in a nightmare of restlessness for weeks after the trip to Chicago. She had passed all the tests—Lieutenant Riley, the Procurement Officer, had told her she had done well in them—and she had passed the physical examination without a question on her record. After hours of waiting to be interviewed, they had talked to her of England—the work she had done there; and then, with eleven other successful applicants, she had been sworn in as an Apprentice Seaman. For a brief while she had thought they would tell her when to report to the Midshipmen's School in Northampton, Massachusetts, but they had explained that all applicants had to be finally approved by Washington. "We will notify you as soon as we hear from the Bureau of Personnel," Lieutenant Riley explained.

And Becky had been waiting ever since. She began to fear that if she didn't hear soon, her mother, who sensed her agitation with ill-concealed alarm, would become a nervous wreck before she did.

Then late one afternoon in December, Olsen met her on horseback and handed her the mail. She thumbed through it quickly and saw what she had been waiting all these weeks to find.

"Take the rest of it to the house, Olsen." She kept out the letter that bore the return address of the Office of Naval Officer Procurement and handed the others to Olsen. When she tore at the flap of the envelope, she realized that her hands were shaking.

Her horse stamped impatiently in the cold air.

"Quiet, girl," she said gently. "If this is what I hope it is, I'll gallop you to the river for all you're worth."

She opened the letter slowly and squinted at it, hoping her eyes would fall on one word that would encourage her to read it. She saw "Active Duty with pay—" and spread the paper out before her on the saddle. Her heart began a wild thumping.

"You are hereby ordered to active duty with pay and directed to proceed and report to the Commanding Officer, Women's Reserve Midshipmen's School at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, on January 16, 1943."

Becky read on further. Clutching her orders in one hand, she picked up the reins.

"All right, old girl, let's go."

Olsen stood scratching his head as Becky flew by him, spurring her mare up the hill as if all the devils in

hell were pursuing her, and waving in one hand a piece of paper that flapped against the wind.

"Must be a letter from her beau," he chuckled. "But if she isn't careful, she's going to break that mare's leg."

* * * * *

Becky left Goshen in the middle of January. Not once, since the evening they had talked about the Waves in front of the fire until the small hours of the morning, had Mrs. McLeod gone back on her decision to make the most of an inevitable bargain. Toward the last, after her orders had come to report to the Midshipmen's School on the 16th of January, Becky's only problem had been tactfully to dispose of the mountains of woolens her mother had piled on the bed for Nolie to pack. She protested feebly, many times, that her orders restricted the amount of clothes that she took, but Mrs. McLeod had an indisputable reason for everything she added to the growing heap.

"There's no use packing my riding clothes, Mother. The closest I'll get to a stable will be the state of my room if I have to clean it up myself."

Mrs. McLeod's face froze. "Whatever you do, Becky, don't step out of your clothes and leave them where they fall. They'll think you don't know better."

I've never had a keen eye for dust. I hear the Navy hates it. I do, too, but I won't promise to dispose of it to their satisfaction. As for making those corners to a bed, square, or whatever they are——"

"Your grandfather was a naval officer—a distinguished one," Mrs. McLeod reminded her.

"Well, I never heard him mention his bed-making technique—didn't he have someone to do it for him?"

Mrs. McLeod turned her eyes toward the fire in a gesture of disgust. "Your grandfather made his own bed until he died. He liked—whatever the Navy does to beds—that no one else does."

Becky didn't know why she thought of that remark as the train pulled out of La Grange, unless it was because it was so typical of her mother to remember such a thing about her grandfather; as if, in his dying hours, he had been consumed by the passion to turn a square corner. She thought, for a long time, of all the things her mother had said to put the stamp of her approval on this impulsive decision. Perhaps she had sensed that it wasn't really impulsive. It had been, in the beginning, when she had opened the paper and seen that photograph of a Wave regimental review at Northampton. But it had become less so with every day that she had thought about it, realizing that nothing could bring her closer to the satisfaction of the London days.

Becky closed her eyes to the familiar Kentucky countryside. It would never do to remember this, to remem-

ber rolling Bluegrass country when she was in the dead of a New England winter, "Marching in fair and inclement weather," as her instruction sheet had said—most of it either bad or inclement, she was sure, as long as she would be there.

Becky began, instead, to wonder what she had let herself in for; to wonder what Ronnie would say if she could discuss these things with him any longer.

Toward four o'clock the next afternoon, as the train approached Northampton, she began to feel nervous. It was the first doubtful qualm she had had, and she wasn't sure whether it was the amount of her luggage that had become the eventual compromise, or her own inevitable reaction to a sea of women and room-mates, that disturbed her. From all appearances, several of her fellow-travellers were bound for the same destination. She tried to imagine living in a room with any of them, but the more she thought about it, the more she doubted her adaptability. It was far different, being bombed out of a house and sleeping in a shelter with crowds of strange people, but deliberately to share the intimacies of a bedroom for six weeks with someone you had never seen before!

The train ground to a stop. If there was a station platform, Becky couldn't see it for luggage. It made her feel a little easier. She must remember to tell her mother that she could have brought everything with her that she owned, including her horse, without being

particularly conspicuous. But when she went to the rear of the coach to extricate her luggage from the mountain of suitcases, skis and duffel-bags, she felt sorry for the seaman who was going to carry it to her room. Suddenly she was less aware of her luggage than of the blue uniforms that confronted her. There seemed to be an endless parade of them, encasing more pleasant people than she had visualized. As her suitcases were thrown off the train, retrieved by a seaman and added to the sea of baggage, she felt a sudden stab of nervousness. What did she do now? And where, in the name of Heaven, was her self-confidence? She had gotten off of trains in stranger places than this without feeling that she had abandoned everything familiar to her.

A Junoesque Wave descended upon her, smiling pleasantly. She returned the smile uneasily. How did Seamen speak to officers? One thing was certain. They didn't stand in dumb confusion.

"I'm Rebecca McLeod," she said, surprised at the firmness of her own voice.

"Oh, yes," the Wave replied. "We're glad to have you. I'm Ensign Young. Your luggage is all here?"

Becky nodded. "It begins there and ends here."

"You have a good deal." The Wave began to count and Becky cursed Nolie for not having crammed everything into half the space. "You get labels inside the station—and hand in your papers—the officers there will tell you what to do."

Becky took her place at the end of a line that curved around the wooden benches. It was a little easier to be surrounded by people as green as she.

"What do they do to us here?" a voice from the heart of the Carolinas inquired.

"They said they were billeting us."

"Oh." She sounded as if she didn't know any more about it than she had before. "Why, there's Betty Talbott! What do you call a Wave you've known since you were ten?"

Becky turned to look at the Carolinian who had found an officer friend and was apparently as hopelessly lost in military etiquette as she herself was. The girl was large, bare-headed and loaded down with coats, books and Navy papers, which she was making an effort to assort. She gave Becky a good-natured, slightly curious grin. Someone behind her said, "Call her Miss Talbott. She can't mind that."

"She oughtn't to. When I think of the parties my mother made me invite her to! What is she?"

"What do you mean?"

"That stripe. What's her rank? If she were a WAAC I'd know. My father's a colonel. Can you tell me what on earth possessed me to join the Navy?"

"I think she's an Ensign."

The Carolinian stepped out of line and approached the officer. Becky watched with open interest.

"Aren't you Miss Talbott?"

"Yes, I am." The Wave studied her face for a moment. "Why, you're Ann Barrett."

"That's right." Ann Barrett ran a hand, surprisingly small for her size, through her thick brown hair.

"How nice to see you. Which are you—Wave or Spar?"

"Wave. Father wanted me to join the WAAC's, but I can't stand Iowa."

The Ensign's face showed signs of freezing, but the new arrival seemed not to notice. "How do you like it up here?"

"I wouldn't be anywhere else."

Ann got the drift of the atmosphere. "Well, that's fine. Certainly is nice to see you. I guess I'd better get back in line."

"If I can do anything to help you—" the Ensign offered, thawing as rapidly as she had frozen.

"Thanks. Thanks very much," Ann mumbled, and pushed into place behind Becky. "We're in the Navy now," she said.

An officer took Becky's papers from her hand, looked at her orders and motioned her on to the row of tables where other officers pored over papers as busily as immigration officials aboard ship on landing day. They seemed to know just where to reach without looking up.

An attractive, dark-haired woman with the one and a half stripes of a Lieutenant (jg) on her arm pushed a stray lock under the brim of her blue hat and gave

Becky a swift, appraising glance. It was perhaps the most comprehensive glance Becky had ever been subjected to, and she couldn't, for the life of her, decide whether it was favorable or not. There was an intense and very human quality in the officer's brown eyes, not entirely in keeping with the general impression she created. She sat a little stiffly and was impeccably groomed. About her full lips there was an expression of boredom. She handed Becky a card on which was written "Rebecca McLeod—N45." It was Greek to Becky, but she put it in her pocket.

"That's your billet number," the Lieutenant explained. "Show it to one of the officers outside. She'll tell you where the bus is."

Becky decided that the Ford assembly line must be something like this, and followed orders. It might be fun never to make a decision for yourself again.

The officer on the platform told Becky that N meant Northrop. It rang a bell. A Smith College friend of hers had lived in a house named Northrop. That was one thin connection with home. 45 was her room number—her billet. She must remember to be nautical. Stairs were ladders, floors were decks, beds were bunks. Would she ever be able to say so unself-consciously?

Ronnie would have laughed himself sick if he could have seen her teed up in the back of the bus with forty bewildered, chattering women. Becky couldn't bring

herself to start a conversation with any of them. It was more interesting to watch and listen—to hear all the questions asked that were tumbling through her own brain. "When do you suppose we eat? I haven't had anything since breakfast." "Where are we going now?" "What does N15 mean?" "Do you know who you're rooming with?"

The last question particularly interested Becky, but she had no idea how one went about solving it, except to walk into the room assigned to her, pray, and wait to see what followed.

She heard Ann Barrett, sitting in the front of the bus, raise her voice querulously. "You don't suppose I'll draw someone with three legs, do you?"

"When I had my Navy physical, they discovered traces of a penny I swallowed when I was teething. If anything with three legs gets by after that, let me know."

The reply came from some one so encased in scarf and coat that Becky couldn't see her face. The voice had an amusing, rather gay quality about it. She heard the owner of the voice referred to as Goss. She must remember that. Goss, she felt, would lighten the dull moments.

The ride to N45 somehow seemed endless, although Becky was sure it was not far from the station to the Smith College campus. Perhaps it was the bleakness of

the snow-covered streets, the unfamiliarity of New England, and the fact that she had read the same page in *Paths of Glory* four times that created the impression. She wondered what N45, a number that was to be her home for six weeks, would be like. She had a strangely lost feeling, being entirely outside the conviviality that permeated the bus. Everyone seemed to know everyone else except her.

The bus stopped, the door opened and the new arrivals poured out. Becky was the last because she had been sitting on the back seat. She stood alone, for a moment, and looked at the red brick building, connected by a covered porch to another building just like it. The two structures were as similar as all the seamen. "Except Goss and Barrett," she thought. "I'm sure they're individualists and the Navy won't like that for a starter."

If she had felt lost on the bus, she felt as if everything that tied her to the familiar life had been cut when she proceeded in confusion through the next hour.

The brown-eyed lieutenant who had gazed so quizzically at her at the station was here again. She took Becky's billet card and told her that her room was on the fourth deck.

Becky climbed the stairs and searched the corridor for her room. On the threshold she stood in silent admiration. Someone had contrived to put into a room

the size of her mother's coat closet, a double-decker bunk, a chest of drawers, a large table and two chairs. Of course, as it was, without occupants or impediments, an onlooker might assign it to a couple of sedentary pigmies. But how were two average-sized human beings to navigate within its walls without risk to life and limb? She couldn't bring herself to think of her eight pieces of luggage or where the contents could be stowed. She dismissed that problem with the obvious decision that almost everything she had brought would have to be sent home.

Fortunately, there was a good-sized window. Perhaps her roommate wouldn't mind living on the window sill. A gambler by nature, Becky would go so far as to toss for it.

"Found at last!" She turned to face Ann Barrett, whose large eyes were surveying the scene with an incredulous gaze. "Father's lost collar-box. How do you suppose the Navy ever got hold of it?"

Becky laughed, and any tension that might have strained this first meeting of roommates was automatically disposed of.

Ann shrugged massive shoulders and advanced into the room. "Remind me to write him, will you? I'm Ann Barrett. I guess you're stuck with me till we know what the devil this is all about."

"I'm Rebecca McLeod. You might as well start calling me Becky now. There's no point in delaying the

informalities—" she waved her hand around the room —"under the circumstances."

Ann nodded. "It isn't a circumstance. It's an accident. They couldn't possibly know how much I weigh and put me in a room like this." She paused, looked quickly about her. "Have you much luggage?"

Becky hesitated. "Eight pieces. But, of course, I'll send practically all of it home. I didn't realize—rather, I did, but my doting mother didn't. You know—New England winter, and all that. She went hog-wild on woolens. But it isn't all clothes. I have a typewriter and——"

"Don't say any more, please," Ann implored. "I have seven pieces and it's all clothes, or almost all. Our mothers ought to get together. Mine thought the Navy would be more stimulating if I had great-aunt Augusta's picture and hers and father's. And I had to bring my fiance's. And then she thought that I might have occasion to be fetching in a tea gown, and that called for Aunt Marie's brooch, which meant a jewel case. It's really hideous—the brooch, I mean. And Alan brought a radio-phonograph to the train as a going-away present. I couldn't throw it back in the poor boy's face, so I had to bring it. But everything else is clothes. You see, Mother didn't believe I could get out of any school in six weeks, so she insisted on my bringing clothes for the four seasons." She took a deep breath. "Do you suppose there's any way I can dispose of prac-

tically all of it before I have to lug it up those stairs?"

"Isn't anyone going to carry it up for us?" Becky asked.

"Lady," Ann told her, "you're in the Navy now. You do your own carrying."

"Then we'd better begin now," Becky said.

Together they returned to the first "deck." Part of their luggage was there. The rest, they were informed, was on the porch.

"One time," Becky told Ann, "I had to carry a newborn foal. It was nothing compared to this suitcase of yours. *What* have you got in it?"

"Great Aunt Augusta's picture."

They seemed to carry luggage for an eternity, from the porch and the living room to the fourth deck. Becky was concerned about Ann's flushed face and obvious palpitations, but she felt it would only suggest heart failure to mention it, so they labored on, assisting each other, murmuring restrained maledictions on their mothers' heads.

Finally the combined luggage was lined and piled up in the room. They looked at each other and mopped perspiring brows.

"Let's have a cigarette," Becky said. "It will either kill us or cure us after this." She handed a pack to Ann and moved to the open window. The snow was high on the window sill. Ann stood beside her, and they blew the smoke of their cigarettes into the winter air.

"Why did you join?" Ann asked.

"The Waves appealed to me. In spite of this, they still do."

"You mean after London and the war and everything?"

Becky faced her with genuine astonishment. "How do you know that?"

"I heard about it at the station. It seems one of the girls knew who you were. I didn't think I'd draw you for a roommate, but I had my ears open."

"Tell me about it, Ann. I don't understand how any one knew. What did she say?"

"Nothing." Ann answered quickly—too quickly.

"Let's pretend we've been here a month," Becky said. "By then you'll know that I like the truth."

"Really, she didn't say a thing," Ann repeated, "except that—oh, you know—she was talking to some of the others. They thought you might think you knew more about the war than they do. And, of course, it's true. You do."

Becky blew a long streamer of smoke into the frosty air. "But I don't know a thing about the Navy. I'm green as grass. All I want to do is learn. In London I worked in a canteen. I felt I knew every soldier who came into the place. I heard what they had to say. I think I do know the war. I know what it's like to be bombed. But all that only makes me more anxious to

do a good job here. Did you feel that they talked about me as if they thought I were going to expect special attention? Because I don't. I don't want it."

Ann shook her head. "No. Honestly they didn't. I got the impression that they were curious about you."

Becky smiled. "It amounts to the same thing. Well, never mind. It didn't make that impression on you, did it?"

"Ye gods no." Ann expostulated. "I don't care if you're the Queen of Roumania—and you won't either when we've lived in this shoebox for six weeks."

She was lucky, Becky decided. Of all the people who had arrived in Northampton this day, Ann Barrett must be the one person who knew instinctively the right answers. She didn't care now how inconvenient the whole set-up was. No contingency could possibly arise that Ann's sense of humor wouldn't save the day. For the first time since her arrival, Becky gave way to a profound sigh of relief.

"My nose always runs in a crisis," Ann announced, and reached for the box of cleansing tissue provided by the Navy for such emergencies. Her eye fell upon a long sheet of paper—an order from the Company Commander to all apprentice seamen. Quickly her eyes perused the sheet. They moved, unwavering, until they fell upon a special paragraph. "Smoking will be permitted only on the main deck in free hours——"

She ran to the window, snuffed out her cigarette in

the snow, and turned to Becky. "You—we—we're smoking!"

"What's the matter with that?" Becky asked.

"Matter? It's forbidden. We'll be Court Martialed. Throw it away."

Becky obeyed automatically. "But the room smells of smoke. Suppose Lieutenant Lawrence comes up here? Why didn't you tell me?"

"I just saw it. You were here first. Why didn't you see it? It's sitting on the bureau as big as life."

"But that's like boarding school," Becky said.

"Maybe so," Ann conceded. "But I don't suppose you can tell when some dope's likely to burn the place to the ground."

"I haven't sprayed a room with perfume since I was eighteen, but I guess I can begin again," Becky said.

"Wait!" Ann held up a hand. "Alan gave me four bottles of perfume and he didn't hit the bull's eye once. Let's put it to good use."

"I can't say I fancy using the last of my Mary Chess to fumigate the room," Becky admitted.

Ann opened a suitcase and extracted a multitude of bottles. From them she took one, attached a spray to it, and moved about the room, filling the air with the scent of jasmine.

"Of course, no one will have the slightest idea what we've been doing," Becky said.

"Russian Leather would have done a better job,"

Ann mused. "It has a kind of musky tobacco smell. Anyhow, it isn't as if we did it in defiance of the rules. They rack you to the bone, making you carry your luggage up four flights of stairs, and then expect you to have the strength to pick up a piece of paper." She turned the sprayer on herself. "How am I going to study if I can't smoke?"

Becky shook her head. "The Navy never thought of that. Remiss of them, wasn't it?"

A bell shattered the air. "What's that?" Ann went to the door. Becky followed her. "Probably a fire. That's one way to get rid of our embarrassing belongings."

"I don't think it is a fire," Ann said, over her shoulder. "Be quiet. Someone's saying something."

"Muster for dinner." Ann's face lit up like a Christmas tree. "Now that's the kind of an order I like. Do you know I haven't had anything to eat since eight o'clock this morning." She made a quick downward survey of her figure. "Don't tell me it isn't a bad idea."

"I wasn't going to. Mother always says——"

"I know. It's better to be fat and healthy than thin and anemic——"

"How funny. You know, that's actually what she does say."

"So does mine. About those things, let's not beat around the mulberry bush, pet. I'm not a bit sensitive."

Becky changed the subject as quickly as possible. She

was glad she had the wits to realize that, for all Ann's protestations, she was a very sensitive person.

"Muster for dinner" was an experience Becky didn't expect to forget as long as she lived. She was thankful for a heavy coat and the woolens beneath it when they stood in the snow while Lieutenant Lawrence moved along the ranks, asking for people with a sense of rhythm to volunteer as platoon leaders.

Becky wasn't willing to admit that Ronnie had said she danced better than anyone in the world. Perhaps she did, but she wasn't going to take a pig in a poke, and, anyhow, if a platoon leader was anything like a drill sergeant, she knew, without asking, that she could never force her voice to the husky resonance demanded of the position. Besides which fact, all she wanted was to remain an inconspicuous cog in an increasingly impressive piece of machinery.

She could march. She knew that. But she had never marched so far or so steadily in snow half way up the calves of her legs. She wondered if the savage chant of an African tribe of head hunters could be more primeval than the sounds of "Hup, two, three, four" that came from the throat of the seaman who confessed to her sense of rhythm.

It surprised Becky that marching to dinner was more invigorating than taking a pack of Labrador retrievers running before breakfast. By the time her platoon had wormed its way into the Northampton Inn, she

wouldn't have mentioned her appetite to her mother. The only time she had been so hungry was after a raid in London, when she went without dinner and breakfast that had been preceded by a piece of bread and butter and a cup of tea. She looked at the faces behind the long steam table, and then her eyes fell on the menu. Someone had drawn above it a cartoon of a new seaman in her first desperate struggle to get into an upper bunk.

"Frank did that," a pleasant-looking waitress said proudly.

"Who's Frank?" Becky asked, "He's a master."

The waitress pointed to a small, thin-faced man who was dispensing roast lamb. Becky caught a humorous sparkle in his eye when he glanced up at her.

"You like it?" he asked.

"Yes. How do you do it?"

Frank shrugged his shoulders, and put an extra piece of lamb on her plate.

"Hey!" Ann said, "I like it, too, Frank."

Frank laughed and gave in.

When hunger reached a serious crisis, it would pay to have friends among those who filled the plates with food that bore little resemblance to the kind Becky was led to believe she would be challenged to digest. The butcher who was so faithful to her in Goshen couldn't have produced better lamb; and she had her introduction to Wiggin's coffee cake. Yes, life definitely was

good. And, wonders of wonders, they could brew a cup of coffee that tasted like Nolie's best.

Becky and Ann, sitting side by side at the long table, consumed their dinner served on metal trays like shipwrecked sailors whose dream of a square meal had come true.

"I think I'm going to like it here," Ann said.

"Because they feed us so well?" Becky asked.

"Wait a minute." Ann turned lowered brows on her roommate. "That had all the earmarks of getting serious about the Navy."

Becky tried to laugh, but she knew that it didn't carry much conviction. "We'll save that for the proper mood. The food is divine."

"Anything that can satisfy me is divine," Ann confessed. "But all joking aside, this isn't what I was led to believe the Navy sustained itself on. If I weren't scared to death, I'd go back and start all over again."

"So would I," Becky admitted. "But I'm scared, too—scared stiff. And do you know who scares me most?"

"You? Scared!"

"But, definitely."

"Who?"

"Our esteemed Company Commander."

Ann's glance quizzed her. "Why?"

"I don't know. She looks at me in the most non-committal way. I have a feeling she's trying to make up

her mind about me, and it's taking her much too long to satisfy me."

"Don't let that get you down, Becky. She's probably curious, like the rest of them."

"That may be so. But I hate for people to be curious for so long. When I meet anyone, even if it's only for ten minutes, I usually have a pretty good idea of what they're like. Her hesitation suggests that I don't come up to scratch."

"Meaning what? That it worries you?"

"Well, yes, frankly."

"Why? Why do you give a darn?"

"I have to live in her house for six weeks."

"I know that. But she can't bilge you out overnight just because she doesn't like you."

"That isn't the point."

"What is the point, then?"

"I want her to like me."

"Why?"

Becky laughed. "You know, Ann, there was someone named Josephus who ran to your line of conversation."

"Must have been before my time," Ann replied. "I don't seem to remember him."

"No, you wouldn't," Ann said. "You'd have to be older than you are to have come into that school. Anyhow, the only reason I care whether Miss Lawrence makes up her mind or not is because I know that by

the time we leave this place, we're all going to have a lot of respect for her."

"I don't like to ask another question," Ann prefaced, "but how do you know that? If you don't mind my saying so, I think she is perhaps the most supercilious female I have met in many a moon."

"I see your point but you have obviously missed the sense of humor."

"Where is it?"

"In her eyes. Every now and then it comes to the surface. After all, Ann, they've got to give us the works at first. We came in here with a lot of weird ideas about the Navy and no more sense of military discipline—most of us—than a two weeks' old puppy. Unless I miss my guess, she'll teach it to us the quick way."

"I still stick to my guns," Ann said. She turned her attention to her dessert and the conversation lapsed.

"Platoon three!" The voice of the platoon leader filled the dining room with a cacophonous vibration. Becky spilled the last bite of her lemon pie from her fork and jumped to her feet.

"You see," Ann complained, "if you hadn't talked so much, we would have finished."

"I think you'll last through the night," Becky said.

They mustered in the courtyard behind the Hotel. It was deep in snow, and surrounding their mustering place was evidence of what must have been a series

of old carriage houses. Open sheds were filled with sleighs, carriages, four-wheeled relics as old as the prints that lined the walls of the Hotel. Becky would have like to look at them more closely, as she would have liked to have had time to appreciate the Currier and Ives prints. But she stood at attention, in line with 120 shivering seamen whose only wish was for a cadence fast enough to march them up Sunshine Mountain to Northrop House in record time.

Becky and Ann were asleep before taps that night. One of Becky's most earnest prayers came true. Ann didn't snore.

4

SEVEN-THIRTY rolled around the next morning long before it was due. Becky reached out of her lower bunk and groped for the alarm clock on the floor. By the time she realized it was something else ringing, Ann had climbed down the ladder.

"What's the matter?" she demanded sleepily. "What's the bell?"

"The millennium," Becky told her, and yawned dismally. "It's time to get dressed."

"Dressed? It's Sunday and it's dark outside." Ann moved to the window and slammed it shut. "They can't do this to me."

"They've done it," Becky reminded her. "And they'll go on doing it till you're commissioned. You're up and you have to muster in forty minutes."

"But I can't march down Sunshine Mountain at this hour of the morning," Ann protested. "I'll break my leg."

"Think what a nice rest you'll have if you do." Becky crawled out of bed, seized her clothes and went into the closet.

"Don't forget," Ann called after her. "Tomorrow morning's my turn to dress in the closet. You needn't think I don't know it's the only warm place in the room." She put on her bathrobe and started for the shower. "Why did *my* roommate have to be a fresh-air fiend?"

Becky remembered Sundays on the farm—a lazy morning; a leisurely horseback ride in the afternoon along the Goshen hills. Or perhaps friends for lunch and a tour of the farm afterwards. Things changed rapidly there between the visits of her friends. Gasoline and tires at such a premium usually meant that in the interim between visits foals were born, crops had grown up or been harvested, the seasons had changed, and there was much that was new and significant to be seen.

This Sunday was an unknown quantity. The very uncertainty of it held its own stimulation. It was strange how one afternoon and a night could make a seaman feel that she was part of a strangely moving and unpredictable future.

Station church service was like the lull after the storm. When it was over, Becky felt that the tempo of the whole bewildering set-up had slowed down to a point of comprehension. She and Ann spent the after-

noon writing letters, after a determined effort to orientate themselves by strolling along diagonal streets until they were lost.

Suddenly, in the midst of their writing, Ann looked up, pushed her paper away from her and made a wry face. "I guess we're both saying the same thing. Why don't you type it and give me a carbon copy. Much Navy terminology and it's all something quite beyond civilian comprehension."

Becky laughed, "What I've said in this tome I've just written to my mother is going to frighten her."

"Why? Did you tell her you've been scrubbing the floors?"

"I said frighten her, not kill her."

"Well?"

Becky put down her pen and pressed fingers across her eyes. "I don't know, Ann. It's all so different than the thing I expected. I suppose it's been sort of an emotional upheaval to me."

She waited for Ann to smile, but the smile didn't materialize. In infinite relief she went on, putting the crowded thoughts of twenty-four hours into words. "Frankly, I expected a great deal of female bickering. Not obvious, but easy enough to sense beneath company manners. I've always avoided women en masse like the plague because I never saw a group of them in my life who could get along." She picked up the apple she had brought back from Wiggin's and began

to chew on it. "They may be tearing each other's hair out, for all I know. But it doesn't really make any difference if no one knows it except the people who end up without any hair."

Ann nodded. "You started to get serious on me at dinner. Was that what you meant?"

Becky munched her apple. "More or less. What I feel must be a combination of surprise and—well, I suppose—tremendous respect. I've been in a lot of places under very satisfying circumstances, but I never felt so certain before that I was doing the only thing I wanted to do."

"I get the general idea." Ann picked up her pen and went on with her letter. "It's tough on skepticism, isn't it?"

"Very tough," Becky agreed.

That evening was the seamen's first real introduction to their company commander. The mates piped the decks and announced a meeting with Lieutenant Lawrence at 8 o'clock on the main deck.

When they gathered, filling the room and overflowing onto the stairs, a log fire was already crackling, throwing restless, hypnotic shadows on fender and fire bench. It gave the room a warm and friendly glow. Seamen who were still strangers began speaking to one another.

Katherine Goss sat down beside Becky.

"What do you suppose this is all about?" she asked.

"I wish I knew," Becky answered. "Maybe Miss Lawrence has some announcements to make." She noticed Goss's hands, folded in her lap. They were the long, slender hands of an artist. Her face was sensitive, too—a rather swarthy, fine-drawn face; thin, slightly aquiline nose and deep-set brown eyes that changed mercurially from a reflective to a humorous mood.

"I hear you and a piano are something out of this world," Becky said. "I wish you could play for us now."

"So do I."

"How long did you study?"

"Many years. I studied in Munich before the war. I wanted to be a concert pianist."

Becky caught an unguarded sadness in Goss's voice.

"The war ruined a lot of hopes," Becky said, so spontaneously that Goss looked at her quickly.

Just then the word went around, "Here comes Miss Lawrence."

The seamen got to their feet from all their various positions.

"Sit down, please," Miss Lawrence smiled. "This is a very informal meeting." She took her place beside a small table on which lay a notebook and pencil. "I'm going to stand up so I can see you all." She opened the book. "Now, I want to tell you something

about the school and the Navy—and I want to answer your questions."

Becky wondered if Ann noticed the relaxation of Miss Lawrence's military formality; the friendliness of her eyes caught by the copper glow of the fire.

"In the first place, we are terribly glad to have you here. After all, there is a reason, common to all of us, why we have joined the Women's Reserve. It is the most powerful, impelling force in our lives. We can't help but feel the significance of being among the first women to be members of one of the armed services. That, alone, is the greatest privilege any of us will ever have, and we owe it tremendous responsibility. It means that we forget ourselves, the whole time we are in it." She paused and looked at the faces about her, absorbed, eager to hear all she had to say, like strangers seeking an unknown road. "In civilian life, most of us prided ourselves on our individuality. People are pretty dull without it. But in training here there is no place for it. Orders are given, and they are obeyed without question. "I might," she smiled, "go mad and order you to carry one another pick-a-back down Sunshine Mountain—and you would do it because it was an order."

The seamen laughed and hoped the evening would go on indefinitely.

"We want you in the Navy and we need you—but I must warn you, you might be the most devastating crea-

tures alive and drip with willingness to learn; however, if you don't make the grade, out you go with presto-like rapidity. Your course grades and aptitude are measured on a cold-blooded, mathematical basis. 4.0 is perfection. Only one person, so far, has earned it. We had to chain her to the station to keep her from floating right off to Heaven!"

The seamen were inching forward, prodded on by those on the steps who felt they were missing something when a sentence was drowned in laughter.

"Aptitudes," Miss Lawrence continued, "are worth explaining. They are given on a 4.0 basis at the discretion of the Company Commander. You might get an aptitude for carrying out your duties particularly well; you might also get one for being late to muster; or for the inability to adapt yourself to the life you lead here. They can be good or bad and the 4.0 will either remain in its virgin state or shrink below a 2.5—and that is when you are in very serious trouble." She smiled at the sober faces. "And now I want to tell you something of Naval etiquette. You will be very familiar with it before your personnel course is over, but in the meantime I don't want to see any of my seamen pushing through doors in front of officers, not standing when they come in the room, forgetting to "sound off——"

A voice from the back of the room inquired impetuously, "What does 'sound off' mean?"

"Giving your name—Seaman So-and-so, Lieuten-

ant or Ensign—before saying anything else. It is done for the benefit of the officers until they learn your names."

Miss Lawrence expanded her theme and then launched into her pet subject—the policing of one's quarters for inspections—expected or unexpected. When she had finished, a hand shot up.

"Seaman Seaman, Lieutenant—" a short, wiry-haired girl with restless brown eyes sounded off.

"I beg your pardon?" Miss Lawrence said.

"Seaman Seaman——"

Someone sitting at Miss Lawrence's feet whispered, "That's her name."

A faint flush colored the Company Commander's cheeks. "Yes?"

"Can't I even have my boy friend's picture on the dresser?"

"I'm afraid you'll have to save him for Sunday afternoon."

"Gee!" The frustrated seaman sat down.

Another hand rose and a seaman with accentuated curves about her figure, spoke from the stairs, "Seaman Watson, Lieutenant—can't I keep my phonograph in my room? I've brought all of Beethoven's symphonies with me—I just don't think I could EXIST without them."

Ann leaned across to Becky. "Help! She lives on our deck!"

Miss Lawrence coughed. "Yes, Watson. You can keep your phonograph in your room—if you don't disturb anyone." Watson nodded, and a rather pained expression settled on her face. As if Beethoven could *disturb* anyone!

At the end of the meeting, Miss Lawrence picked up her notebook. The seamen began to rise. Miss Lawrence raised her hand. "There's just one more thing I want to say. The officers—all of us, want you to think of us as your friends. You mustn't confuse the discipline we enforce with our personal feelings about you. We're here to make good Naval officers of you—and we're going to do it, with your co-operation."

The bell sounded taps. "Good-night and smooth sailing," Miss Lawrence said, and watched the seamen go reluctantly to their quarters.

"Becky?" Ann called softly into the darkness, "are you awake?"

"Yes."

"I guess you win the argument about Lawrence. But don't get the idea I give in that easily about everything."

It happened the next morning. Because it was black as a coal pit, Becky wasn't at all sure that she wasn't dreaming some terrible nightmare. It was like the dreams she used to have, ages ago, when someone was

chasing her with a knife, and she was trying to run on a treadmill. She and Ann hadn't spoken since the bell had jolted them out of an exhausted sleep at 6:25. The will power that it took to rouse them from their warm bunks in the frigid cold of their room left them to dress and move to formation like petrified automata. They walked gingerly down the icy steps and skirted the circle where shadowy figures had preceded them, contracted within inadequate civilian garb. The voice reached Becky as if from a great distance.

"McLeod!"

At first she paid no attention to it. As long as she could remember, no one had ever addressed her by her last name, unless for a diabolical or offensive reason. When it rang out the second time, on an impatient note, she turned toward the general direction of the sound and was surprised to discover that Miss Lawrence could so raise her voice and that she was walking behind her.

"Yes, Lieutenant," she replied, remembering the military formula just in time to avoid committing the indiscretion of a monosyllable.

Miss Lawrence looked her squarely in the eye. "I want you to take the platoon to breakfast."

If the request had really been a request, Becky would have answered, "Not on your life, do it yourself." But she had heard somewhere that the wish of a superior officer was a command. She looked at Ann, who gave

her the questionable consolation of shrugging her shoulders. Then her eyes slid back to Miss Lawrence, as if she still had hopes that that command were part of the ugly dream. Miss Lawrence was moving away, having set her time bomb with uncanny accuracy. There was a rigidly unsympathetic look about her back in its well-tailored greatcoat.

"Ann, I can't do it. I don't know what to say."

"Of course you can, bub. You know—hup, two, three, four. Column left—harch!"

"No, I can't!" There was a note of abject horror in Becky's voice that stopped Ann on the brink of another facetious remark. "You can do it as well as anyone else," she stated firmly.

"But I can't, I tell you. It embarrasses me."

"You've got to. And I'll break the neck of the first creature who doesn't keep step."

Becky smiled weakly and took her place in front of the thirty-five seamen who faced her with as much doubt in their dimly recognizable faces as she felt in her own confidence. She wished the orders of the day, read to the company, would never end. But they did.

"Company——"

An isolated figure on Becky's left bellowed "Platoon!"

After a moment's hesitation, she said "Platoon," too, but no one behind the first squad heard her. She cleared her throat and tried to take a grip on her

nerves. It was perfectly ridiculous for a thing like this to set swarms of butterflies loose in her stomach. She would pretend that she was trying to catch Olsen's ear across the big alfalfa field.

"Attention!!" Miss Lawrence's voice brooked no hesitation. A sudden, rigid movement of the seamen brought them up like thirty-five fawns at bay.

"Dress right——"

"Dress right," came the echo from the platoon leaders.

"Dress!" Arms shot out and heads turned. Becky realized that her platoon was the last to respond. "Naturally, you fool," she told herself sharply, "if you're going to play follow-the-leader."

"Ready front!" She got it out first, and felt a kindling of hope that took her up to "Forward march!" But there her spirits began to fail her. "Hold your hat, McLeod, you're going for a ride," Becky warned herself. She tried to draw some confidence from Ann's straight, rigid back. How faithful of her to be so belligerently military.

Becky's platoon, moving forward like a solid, shadowy body in the darkness of early morning, gave her the sense that she had set something in motion she would never be able to stop. What if she should forget the commands—march them over a hedge before she could remember "Column right"? The thought galvanized her. "Which way *were* they turning out of the

driveway? Right or left?" She strained her eyes at the darkness and for the life of her couldn't tell.

Suddenly right seemed wrong. It must be left, down the hill, the way they had come from the station. She gave the command, "Column left—march!" held her breath and watched Ann's bobbing head. The head turned right, as if she had not spoken. Darn Ann! Why didn't she listen? Becky quickened her pace beside the marching line. How would she stop them or turn them around? Why hadn't Miss Lawrence picked on someone else? And then she saw, before her, another column and another. The company—the whole company—and her platoon was going the right way. "Oh, Ann, I'm sorry!" she thought, with a wild stab of relief. "I might have known you'd do the right thing—but how, how did you make the rest of them do it?" She watched her platoon with swelling pride. They were all in step—all except Perkins in the last rank. But then Perkins hadn't been in step since she joined the Navy.

When she had settled the platoon down at the Northampton Hotel Becky felt that the worst was over, but her appetite had fled.

"Aren't you going to eat anything?" Ann asked.

"You know perfectly well what the state of my nerves is," Becky grumbled.

Ann gave her a sidelong glance. "You did all right."

"You know what I did."

"Well, it turned out all right, didn't it?"

"Yes, it turned right, thanks to you."

"Forget it," Ann said and got up with her tray. Becky was still picking at a piece of toast when she returned shamelessly with a second breakfast more formidable than her first.

5

BECKY WAS glad when classes began. It seemed more like the Navy she had expected to begin studying the terminology and traditions and ships of the sea; to begin unravelling the mystifying organization of the service they had joined. Marching home from Faunce Auditorium with nine impressive volumes, all of which, in a hasty glance, she realized were Greek to her, she had a feeling of expansive pride. Grandfather Rogers would have nothing on her by the time she was able to take an examination in any one of these subjects. She must remember not to be insufferable when Naval Law and Organization made any sense. The only thing that was certain not to give her any trouble was "Ships and Aircraft," but she would not remember that course as the seamen would be expected to. She would hear the ominous drone and then the roar and finally the violence of the explosion and the

shuddering of the earth which would mean a "big 'un" or a "little 'un." But she supposed she would get used to discussing planes in objective terms, as if they were things that flew around only to be identified, the way she had grown used to being a platoon leader. It surprised her that she could "Hup, two, three, four" in a voice that no more resembled her pre-Navy voice than a fog-horn resembled a harp.

If, when she returned to civilian life, her mother despaired of ever hearing the soft Kentucky intonation again, she could say, "Tell it to the Navy." If Miss Lawrence had attacked the matter of her platoon leading with frigid disapproval, Becky would have been prepared to relinquish the honor. But when she turned a speculative glance on her and said, "You're afraid of your commands, McLeod. Try throwing them at their feet," Becky stiffened. Miss Lawrence wasn't going to let her fail. This was going to be a private, drawn-out case of discipline until she had learned to lead a platoon better than anyone else. "Hupping" thirty-five seamen had no connection with anything Becky had ever done in her life. But at the implication that she didn't have the sense to learn so apparently simple a duty, she could hear Grandfather Rogers rolling over in his grave. There was only one answer to this little game going on between her and her platoon—The "Bluejackets Manual," and a box of aspirin.

"Liberty for an hour in the afternoon is like opening the cages at the Bronx Zoo," Ann remarked, and backed into a corner of the living room. "I'd just as soon face a herd of stampeding buffalo with a shooting stick as try to get out of this place first."

"Never mind, you know that waitress you've hoodwinked at Beckman's is going to save you a piece of chocolate cake." Becky pulled on a pair of fur-lined gloves and looked at the frosty window. "Personally I'd rather sit here, if someone would light the fire, bring me the afternoon paper and a mulled sherry. Why we all mush through that snow again proves what happens to your sense of balance when you've been confined for the first time in your life. It's practically up to our hips, we've shivered through five classes and here we are just itching to get out in it again."

Ann pulled the flaps of her ski cap down over her ears and tied the ribbons under her chin, giving her face a ludicrously bald expression. "Maybe you don't understand it, but Patrick Henry and I were cut off the same piece of cloth. You know—'Give me Liberty or give me Death.'"

They followed in the wake of the other Northrop Seamen. Becky turned down the brim of her gabardine rain hat and tugged at the collar of her coat. When one hand froze, she put it in her pocket and held her collar together with the other.

Ann was speechless, which convinced Becky that she had not underestimated the temperature.

Were a few minutes' freedom going to be this precious to them for the duration? The exhausting hours of Becky's London work were part of a tempo that had become normal; but the weeks in Kentucky had reacquainted her with the comparative leisure of the real normal—planning one's own routine, keeping the candle intact at one end or the other. Now she was back in the driving existence that brought the war very close again—training on an accelerated schedule for unfamiliar jobs that would ordinarily take months to learn, and this hour that she and Ann were about to spend shopping was something like the "all-clear" after a raid. Perhaps Ann knew why she was plowing such a resolute furrow through the snow, but Becky didn't. Vaguely, shopping, but there wasn't anything Becky really wanted or needed. Shopping to her seemed to have become an expression of freedom, a place to go and meet other seamen expressing their freedom in the same way; buying among the necessities, endless inane things. And then, of course, Beckman's. Coffee and a sandwich, fabulous ice-cream concoctions one couldn't dream of eating in civilian life and not wake up with violent indigestion. Of course, it was all the marching that hovered over their digestions like a guardian angel.

"Ann, I want to go home and relax now," Becky said.

"I'm worn out watching you eat those two club sandwiches. How do you do it?"

"Hollow leg," Ann replied, chewing weakly.

They walked slowly up the hill, loaded down with packages of all sizes and shapes. Most of them belonged to Ann, who inclined her large frame wearily against the force of gravity.

"You're not going to have a dime left when indoctrination is over," Becky said.

Ann wagged one free finger. "Oh, yes I will. Mother wrote me today that she's paid all my bills, and I can always hock the silver frame around Great Aunt Augusta's picture." She paused, took a deep breath and marched on. Marching had become a habit. "You know, it's a funny thing. Great Aunt Augusta really can't stand me. When I was five she said I'd come to no good end. But when I joined the Waves, she saw it in the local society column and sent her chauffeur around with her picture, and a cryptic note to the effect that she didn't think I had it in me, but of course her family had always had the courage of their convictions and I might have absorbed a soupçon. You can imagine what *that* did to me! She once gave a frightening party and, to my horror, invited Alan and me. I couldn't figure it out for about five minutes, and then she cornered Alan and raised all kinds of storm warnings. After it was over, he made me take the flowers out of my hair so he could see my horns."

"If you really feel that way about her," Becky said, "do I *have* to look at her picture every Sunday?"

Ann laughed. "Does it bother you so much? No, of course you don't. It's a funny thing what Sunday does to me. It was always a wonderful day in our house. Father got up at seven instead of six-thirty, Mother waited for Annie to get his breakfast and Lucy and I slept a hole through our pillows. Somehow, Great Aunt Augusta ties up with it all like the tail on a kite."

"Can't you call her Aunt Augusta? The picture wouldn't conjure up such terrible things if you could drop the 'Great.'"

"I call her that out of respect. She claims the family fell off after her generation."

When they opened the door and walked into Northrop, the heat in the hall assaulted them like a blast furnace. Through the heat and the general confusion created by seamen and their bundles, they caught the melodious strains of "A Guy To Tie My Tie."

"I don't need a guy to give me sympathy——"

"The hell I don't," Ann said. "Who's playing? She didn't learn to do that in ten easy lessons."

They followed the music to the living room and saw that it was Katherine Goss, playing like the female reincarnation of Eddie Duchin swinging with enviable ease from "A Guy——" to "Waves of the Navy" and on into Cole Porter. How long they sat there, they didn't know, but nothing could have moved them until Seaman

Goss stopped abruptly, said "That's all for now, sailors," and left the piano to a silence as acute as a lovely voice suddenly struck dumb.

Becky and Ann looked at each other. "I know," Ann sighed, "You're thinking of El Morocco——"

"No," Becky replied distantly. "I'm thinking of a place called Burford, where there wasn't any music at all, except the music in my head."

"Where's Burford?" Ann asked, as they climbed to their deck.

"In England."

"Can you believe," Ann asked, "that anything could make an afternoon in Northampton seem like a Roman holiday?" She dropped her packages onto the bed and slumped into a chair.

Becky shook her head. "Or feel positively giddy over a milkshake at Beckman's. I suppose it's because we've finally absorbed the fact that we won't be able to wander at will for the duration plus six months."

"I haven't absorbed it," Ann confessed. "I just can't believe that for months and months I'll be haunted by bells in my ears or the alarm clock rearing its ugly face at 6:30. I was tired when I came up here, and I'm still tired. I don't mind how hard I work at night, if I can sleep the next morning—sleep—it's getting to be an obsession. But I guess I'll learn to take it—even if I don't love it."

Becky perched on the edge of the bed beside Ann.

"It's the pressure we'll have to get used to, Ann. Marching to breakfast, eating with the minutes beating a tattoo on our trays, 'Secure your Gear!'—marching to class after class, back to Northrop—'Catch your breath, Seamen, it's 'way ahead of you.' We're all getting so we smoke in cadence. I guess we'll learn how to relax before much more of this——"

"Is that the way it strikes you?"

They turned in unison and stared at Miss Lawrence, who stood in the doorway, tapping her pencil against a pile of room inspection slips. "Good afternoon, Lieutenant!" They spoke as if to a ghost and dove for the packages littering the lower bunk, grabbed their gloves from the chest of drawers and their purses from the desk. Burdened with their belongings, they came to attention. Becky's eyes slid to the corner of Ann's bunk nearest her head. There was a perceptible sag to the bed-clothes, and in her haste of the early morning, Ann had somehow achieved a round corner to the spread. Becky's bunk betrayed by imprint their packages and tired bodies.

Miss Lawrence looked at the bunks with a puzzled expression for several moments, then walked to the chest of drawers and ran her fingers across the top. They left parallel tracks of polished maple in dust that Becky would have sworn was not there when she and Ann had left the room. She longed to say so, for otherwise, how was Miss Lawrence to know that they had

gotten up at six for the sole purpose of not allowing this to happen. She could still see Ann on all fours, trying to dust underneath the radiator, getting her entire arm wedged fast and finally extricating it branded with ominous pink lines from wrist to elbow. As for their bunks, they had pulled and tucked like two beavers in utter silence for so long that the muster bell had caught them with Ann's bunk half-made and their shirts off. Of course, they had been late to muster which, they were informed, was an unpardonable breach of military discipline. And now, their room, which should have been an extenuating circumstance, was withering under Lieutenant Lawrence's critical inspection. She looked from one to the other of them, tapped the end of her pencil against her lips and dropped her eyes to the inspection slip.

"Has either of you ever made a bed before?" she asked. Becky saw a suppressed smile working at the corners of her mouth.

They looked at each other. Becky could tell that Ann was thinking of the hour at which they had arisen to scrub and polish and generally make the room measure up to the Company Commander's exacting demands; of their bunks, stripped bare, in preparation for a bed-making from the mattress out, to which nobody could pin an aptitude.

Suddenly the question struck her as being unneces-

sarily caustic. "Yes, Lieutenant," she answered, "many beds, many times."

"Of course I realize you have just come in from shopping, but your room could be improved upon. Let me show you how the Navy makes beds."

"Thank you, Lieutenant," Ann replied so vociferously that Becky knew she was glad to have avoided an answer to the first question. One could tell to look at Ann that some good-natured darky servant in South Carolina had spoiled her since the day she was born. It was just as obvious that she would have crawled into an unmade bed every night in the week rather than make it herself, and that only the Navy and Grandfather Rogers' ghost drove her to the effort she was making now.

"That settles it," Ann said when Miss Lawrence had left them. "Tomorrow I will buy everything we need to set up housekeeping in a serious way. If it's the last thing I do, I am going to get a 'Seaman-like and shipshape' slip out of her. I am going to frame it, hang it up to look at every day until we graduate and then send it home."

"Funny how small things can assume such vast importance," Becky reflected. "But I suppose it's all part of the scheme—discipline, attention to minor details. I don't imagine we would do the big things well if we didn't do the little things right."

It was cold that night and they were tired. An hour before taps Becky opened the window a crack and crawled into her bunk.

"Do you have to leave the refrigerator door open!" Ann complained. Becky knew by the trembling framework of the bunks that Ann was burying herself beneath the covers. There would be no conversation tonight—no thoughts spoken aloud into the intimate darkness of the room. Ann was asleep when the door opened a few minutes later and the Mate of the Deck stood there, peering at the blackness.

"McLeod?"

"Yes," Becky whispered.

"Telephone."

"For me?"

"No. It's for the Captain but he wants you to take it!"

"I'll be right there."

Becky put on her dressing gown and tip-toed out of the room, for Ann was still asleep. Who could be calling her here? Was it her mother? The fears that tumbled through her mind shook her like a summer storm. She mustn't think of it. She must think that her mother was lonely and had called her up to talk to her, and complain because she hadn't written oftener. Well, she hadn't written often enough. The nights weren't long enough to study and write letters and be in bed by ten, and anyhow, one's brain was like a sodden sponge at the end of the day.

She picked up the receiver with clammy hands. "Hello?"

"Hello. Becky?" This was a man's voice. A voice vaguely familiar, but she couldn't place it. "How's the Navy?"

"Still afloat, but who——?"

"It's Sam Wilding."

"Where are you?" She caught her voice on the brink of freezing.

"You don't sound very enthusiastic about a voice from home."

"I'm just surprised. Telephone calls from Kentucky aren't on my daily schedule. You are in Kentucky, aren't you?"

"I'm in Maine."

"What are you doing in Maine?"

"Being a soldier."

"Sam, are you fooling?"

"No." His voice was suddenly strained, as if she had hurt him.

"What about the farm?"

"I leased it."

"You did?" It was incredible. She couldn't help the long, awkward pauses. "When did you join up?"

"I got my commission a couple of weeks after you left."

"I didn't know you were trying."

His slow, deep laugh came over the phone. "That

means you didn't even miss me. I was at it for months."

"I was so busy," she said quickly. "And I thought you were going to raise hemp."

"And it occurred to me one day that you didn't think the idea was so hot——"

"I didn't say that——"

"I agreed with you. That's why I'm here. And now I am going to see you. I am holding a leave slip for the week-end in my hand right now. It has Northampton all over it."

"This week-end?" She must stop badgering him with monosyllables. "That's wonderful, Sam! It'll be great fun to see you again. You know there's nothing to do here, but I'd rather hear all your news of home than go to the gayest party in New York."

"You're a liar," he said, "but it sounds good." There was another pause. "They haven't changed you, have they? You seem terribly restrained."

She had the sensation of sticking a pin in herself. "I was asleep," she said.

"Well, I'll let you run on back to bed. But where shall I meet you? I'll be there Saturday, around four."

She thought quickly. Where could she meet him that they wouldn't be surrounded by seamen—an outsize inspection party that would probably take him apart and put him together again. There wasn't any place! "Meet me at the Northampton Hotel," she told him.

"All right. Be a good sailor." He was gone, and the

phone was staring her in the face like a dead codfish. So much for that.

Becky climbed the stairs to bed. The room was like an ice-box. Ann's deep, regular breathing softened the sharp whistling of the wind. She got under the covers and lay on her back, gazing at the springs of Ann's bunk. They sagged dangerously, she thought.

"What if it should cave in on me? I'd feel just the way I felt when I heard Sam Wilding's voice—trapped and rigid. What is it," she wondered, "that makes the difference between loving someone and not loving someone else. Lots of women would be mad for Sam. They wouldn't be able to sleep tonight for that telephone call. He's certainly attractive, charming, fastidious. He performs all the nice, Virginia gallantries, and yet I might just as well have heard from one of the Anderson boys, for all the effect it's had on me. When I used to talk to Ronnie I felt disembodied. It didn't matter what he said or how he said it. If I was speechless, it was because I didn't trust my own voice. Oh, Ronnie——!"

Becky turned over and buried her face in the pillow, smearing hot tears across her cheeks.

6

SAM PHONED on Tuesday night. On Wednesday Ann woke up in a wonderful humor. "Ah, the Navy, he is divine!" She yawned and stretched and the bunk swayed precariously.

"You make me sick!" But Becky laughed. "And stop wiggling. This whole structure is going to collapse."

"But this is a wonderful day," Ann insisted. "I slept like the dead and I've got my second wind. You can tell 'em the war'll be over in no time."

"You have forgotten one little thing," Becky reminded her.

"I have forgotten nothing but the sub-headings under Vice CNO."

"You have forgotten," Becky went on, "that today we are shot."

"Ye gods! What is it—tetanus or typhoid?"

"Typhoid—I think."

"But that's the one that swells me up like a poisoned pup!"

"The Navy will cry its eyes out, but you shall have it all the same."

"You've ruined my day."

"That's what you get for being so cheerful."

"All right. I've learned my lesson. If I ever wake up feeling like this again, I'll button myself in a strait-jacket before I let you know it."

Wiggin's best breakfast of fried apples, sausage and scrambled eggs didn't meet with the reception it deserved. There were some who hesitated to waste the energy swallowing what might so soon come up again; there were others who were too scared to eat; and the rest ate apprehensively, but bravely. Only Ann seemed to eat defiantly, as if it were the last meal she expected for the duration.

A curious stillness settled over the mess hall at the command to "Secure gear!" Becky thought that it was like the moment before the trap is sprung. She hopped her platoon solemnly to Naval History and they fought the battle of Jutland in forty minutes.

When they mustered afterwards, on the path before Burton Hall, a gale drove the snow in violent eddies that stung their faces, lashed their legs and coated them from head to foot. The company moved off like a white caterpillar, up the hill, across the Smith College campus and on at a laborious cadence to the dispensary. Pla-

toons One and Two managed to telescope themselves beneath the cover of the erstwhile garage. Becky and Platoon Three shivered on the weather side of the gasoline pumps. And then the long line moved, one by one, in one door, past the automatic thrust of the needle and out the other door.

It wasn't so bad. In any case, there was plenty of consolation in the fact that they could check tetanus, typhoid and smallpox off the list for a good many years to come; invade the Tropics and step on rusty nails without fear of being sent home in a box. Back to the Hotel across the street to wait. It was a welcome interval.

Becky sat down and closed her eyes. Was she superhuman? Most of the seamen looked so apprehensive, so miserable, and yet she felt nothing. All the shots she had had here must have fought the shots they gave her in London to a stand-still. Someone tapped her on the shoulder.

"Perkins has passed out."

Becky got to her feet. "Where is she?"

"In the dressing room."

She hurried there, and saw Perkins, stretched out on the inadequate sofa. It reminded her of all the women, crowded into close and dismal shelters, fainting, not for fear of themselves, but for fear of those that they loved.

Becky opened the collar of Perkins' shirt and rubbed

her hands. In a moment, her eyes opened. At first they were bewildered, as eyes are when they look from a dream into reality. And they were embarrassed. She sat up too quickly and began to sway.

Becky pressed Perkins' head against her shoulder. "Take it easy."

Perkins relaxed, and in a minute was on her feet again. "Can you imagine that happening to me? Why, it's the first time I ever fainted in my life!" She was indignant.

Becky laughed. "You're just in time for Naval Personnel. Do you think you can make it?"

"Of course. I don't promise to follow Mrs. Barker's hands, but you can count me among those present."

Becky gave Perkins a pat on the shoulder. "I imagine we'll be mustering in about ten minutes."

She left the dressing room and turned out of the side door into the street. A breath of air, even frigid air, was good after the heat of the Hotel and the Dispensary.

It was strange how one's attitude toward people changed after a couple of weeks in the Navy. Perkins had been the goon of the platoon. She was probably the original inspiration of "Ginny the Ninny." But when Perkins fainted and came up taking it on the chin, she wasn't a goon any longer. Whether she would ever get through indoctrination was another question. Becky wasn't entirely familiar with Navy standards, but how

anyone could stagger along with a 2.4 average and make the grade was something beyond her comprehension. She would never forget the first disconcerting days of marching behind Perkins, before Miss Lawrence appointed her platoon leader. At first she made the mistake of keeping in step with Perkins when the cadence was called too faintly to be heard, but this policy led her into something like a schottish, for Perkins daydreamed for long spells, suddenly came to and shuffled back in step, then gradually and blissfully went back into a cadence of her own. Finally Becky solved the problem by getting firmly in step and thereafter studiously avoiding so much as a glance at the unsteady feet before her. Only Perkins' head, bobbing out of time as conspicuously as a pogo stick, continued to disconcert her.

Mrs. Barker, Becky thought, was perfectly selected as Personnel Instructor. She reminded her of a chate-laine in uniform. No one, she was certain, had ever seen Mrs. Barker make a move or say a word inconsistent with the dicta upon which her lectures were based. Occasionally, there was a touch of austerity about her delivery. Becky wondered if it was really intentional, or whether Mrs. Barker felt the responsibility of indoctrinating the seamen so intensely that she couldn't resist this form of emphasis. Now and then a flash of humor, an understanding reply to a bewildered seaman, puzzled Becky. What was Mrs. Barker really

like? What was her civilian personality? She'd give a lot to know.

Sometimes Mrs. Barker looked at the class as if she weren't quite certain of their sympathy. She would seem to search for a friendly face, an interested expression, and finding it, would go on with obviously renewed confidence. For one who apparently found it so difficult to throw into her lectures the sort of personal quality that Miss Hollinger did, she was extraordinarily sensitive to the personality of the class.

Becky had sensed this from the beginning and had responded instinctively with rapt attention, hoping that her interest might provide the necessary stimulus.

Mrs. Barker's gestures, the tilt of her head, her hands, more expressive in their quick, unexpected movements than her voice, had come to be an obtrusive part of her personality. She amused the class without giving the slightest indication that she was seeking an effect.

Today, Becky could tell from her impatience to begin her lecture, that she was bursting with something of unusual importance. She stood before them on the platform, hands clasped in front of her, nervously twisting a ring on her middle finger; and today, it seemed to take the class forever to get settled. "Shots" were beginning to react on some, who drooped up the aisles, holding up the files behind them.

"Attention!" The company pulled itself together at Maxwell's command.

Mrs. Barker nodded. "Seat your company."

"Seats!"

Mrs. Barker's eyes moved slowly across the room.

"I have just returned from the First Naval District Headquarters in Boston——"

At the tone of her voice, the class sensed trouble. Mrs. Barker pushed at the hair beneath the brim of her hat in a familiar gesture. "I am still embarrassed by a sight I saw." She paused, "I was sitting in the Commandant's office when an Ensign in the Women's Reserve entered the room, failed to salute, thrust some papers at the Commandant and said, 'I guess these are for you.' Spontaneous smiles froze on the seamen's faces. Mrs. Barker's expression did not encourage the thought that there was anything funny in this betrayal of Indoctrination.

"The officer was a graduate of this school." She gave her words time to sink in. "While she leaned on the Commandant's desk, a yeoman came to the office, saluted, delivered a message, stood at rigid attention with his hands at his sides, saluted again, did an about face and marched out." She paced the platform slowly and came to rest at the edge, staring down into the sleeping face of Perkins.

"That is the sort of thing I mean."

Someone nudged Perkins, who shot bolt upright in her chair and gave voice to a loud, half-conscious laugh. Mrs. Barker stepped back as if a seaman had said to

her, "I guess this is for you." Then Perkins' hand flew to her mouth, and she looked about her, seeking confirmation of the fact that, while she had dozed off, Lieutenant Barker had cracked a huge joke. Meeting only solemn glances, she mumbled an apology and subsided.

Mrs. Barker returned to the lectern and leaned with crossed arms upon it. A quick and violent jerk of the iron rod as it dropped a couple of notches nearly pitched her headlong onto the platform.

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Barker exclaimed. Perkins laughed and this time the class was with her. Even Becky, though aware that platoon leaders were supposed to discourage disorder, laughed until her sides ached. But the loudest laughter of all came from Mrs. Barker, who had recovered her balance, and picking up her notes, was retreating from the lectern as from a tricky assailant. She shook her head.

"Somehow this lecture isn't being conducted with the proper dignity," she said, at last. "But I'm going to finish it my way."

"If she doesn't keep away from that lecture stand, she won't finish it anyway," Ann whispered.

Laughter died to a few scattered snickers.

"After my embarrassing experience in the Commandant's office, I went to a hotel to dine with some friends. There were several Waves there. And while I watched them, wondering who they were, someone

joined them. I refuse to call her a Wave. She wore our uniform but," Mrs. Barker's hand stole upward, "she wore no hat and in her hair—" Her fingers curved above her head, "she wore a bunch of flowers—right here!" Becky had never before seen a human hand so accurately describe flowers trembling in a coiffure.

Obviously, the class wanted to laugh, but it didn't because almost immediately, Mrs. Barker went on. "I hope I needn't add to these little stories, or explain to you that this indoctrination school will have failed if any one goes out from it believing that she is entitled to a single privilege not due a male officer of the Navy. More is expected of you as women because there are so many who still look to you to justify yourselves. Of course, no one expects you to abandon all feminine charm for the duration, but there are certain restrictions on the expression of it, which apparently are not understood by all our officers."

A hand was raised at the back of the room. "Lieutenant Cunningham, Seaman——"

The class laughed, and Cunningham went scarlet. "Oh, I'm sorry! I mean 'Seaman Cunningham, Lieutenant——' "

Mrs. Barker was struggling with a smile. "That's all right, Cunningham, I am frequently demoted by the new seamen. Go ahead——"

"What do you do if an officer wants to take you out and you don't want to go?"

Mrs. Barker clasped her hands before her and collected her formal poise. "In that case, you are a woman first and a naval officer second."

"Does that mean I have to go?"

Another hand shot up. "Seaman Green, Lieutenant. I'm married to an enlisted man. Are there any special rules?"

"Now that presents interesting possibilities," Mrs. Barker mused.

Green nodded but she still looked confused.

"I would advise you to forget the difference in status when you are at home," Mrs. Barker went on.

"Oh, but we do," Green replied.

There were a few muffled snickers.

"And not to embarrass him by expecting him to go to Officers' Clubs with you—I would say that your problem requires infinite tact!" She paused for a moment. "Company Commander take over."

"Rise!" Maxwell commanded, as Mrs. Barker left the room, looking, Becky thought, as if her feet had just touched shore after a hazardous swim through a choppy sea.

Seamen dropped by the wayside all afternoon from the effects of their shots. Classes seemed never to end, and to have even more material compressed into fifty minutes than usual. Through the rather dim consciousness of the survivors, a picture of their future took

shape. Wherever men in the service were working now, *they* would be working, and it wasn't enough that they should vaguely understand the war and their jobs in relation to it.

Their Naval History instructor, a tiny woman whose black, curly hair was prematurely flicked with gray, and whose face was as sensitive as the words of Madame Chiang Kai-shek which she read aloud in a strangely moving voice, explained to them that the work expected of them here was the work that English and Chinese and Russian women had been doing since the war began. She had seen them herself—in communications centers, in offices where scarcely a man was left, manning searchlights and standing by at anti-aircraft guns. Mme. Chiang had written so eloquently of the place of women in the war, and it was the purpose of the Women's Reserve to feed women into the war effort—from the great training schools. In a country increasingly bereft of men, they would take over with the pen and the strength of their bodies and all the scope of their minds. The seamen went away sobered, with a stronger feeling than ever, that this was their war, too.

When they got back to their quarters, Ann was not her usual garrulous self. Becky and Ann settled to their studies with a more intense concentration than they had done before.

Clare Mendenhall came in from the next room to chat. She was chewing an apple and bursting with en-

thusiasm. "The day's almost gone and I haven't felt my shot yet." She beamed.

Becky often wondered at Clare's reason for joining the Waves. She looked like the sort of person who wouldn't forgo a coming-out party to win the war single-handed—a combination of a Powers model and an eighteen-year-old school-girl with a terrific crush on life. She was tall, brown-haired, clear-featured, and had often run the gamut, over coffee at Beckman's with Becky, of the immediate problems of life, from the sophisticated to the nearly adolescent. Ann, for some reason which she didn't divulge, didn't like Clare. Her entrance into the room was always like the preliminary stirring of a hornets' nest.

Ann looked up at her from the corner of her eye, then immediately buried her head in Naval History. The conversation proceeded dually.

"Did you know you're on watch tomorrow, Becky?"

"Good," Becky said. "I'll miss drill."

"I don't see why you don't like it. I think it's fun."

Becky shook her head. "I still can't forget the day Eckenrode made me bring my platoon around, front rank first, after I had pinioned them against the wall."

Clare laughed. "That was funny. You had them going in four directions at once."

Ann reared her head stiffly. "We didn't hear her," she defended stoutly. "How can you hear anything in

that armory, with three Company Commanders yelling commands at the same time."

"Yes, I know," Clare conceded. "It's the echo."

"Echo, my foot!" Ann barked. "There's Simmons in one corner—'By the right flank, march!' And Stoner—'Double to the rear and halt!' And then Pierce—'Circles right and left, harch.' He gives commands in the voice of a drill sergeant with chronic sinus. And with all that din, you expect us to hear? There was nothing the matter with Becky's commands."

"Nothing, dear friend," Becky said soothingly, "except that I gave you a column right when the only way you could have executed it was to march on through the wall of the armory."

Ann grunted and returned to her book. There came from the end of the passageway, the strains of Beethoven's Fifth. Ann crushed her hands to her temples. "Dear gentle heaven! Not again? Will you beg Watson to turn that thing off!"

"But it's lovely!" Clare cried.

Ann's voice rose. "I know it's lovely. It's too, too divine! But I am trying to figure out why Nelson sneaked in behind his own fleet at the Battle of the Nile, just to cross-fire the French, and why the French didn't have sense enough to high tail it out of there. Now can you understand why I'm in no mood for Beethoven's Fifth?"

Clare retreated with her half-eaten apple.

"Ann, you mustn't treat her like that," Becky rebuked.

"But sometimes she acts half-witted." Ann complained. "And Watson and her darned phonograph. There's a conspiracy in this house against my getting through indoctrination. Can you imagine my going home and telling Alan I haven't as much sense as Watson or Mendenhall?"

"You are acting now as if you hadn't the sense of the squirrel who perches in our window," Becky told her.

"That reminds me," Ann said, suddenly at peace again. "Did you remember to feed him?"

"Yes, dear," Becky replied. "He's been nibbling on you the whole time you've been studying. Didn't you notice it?"

* * * * *

Becky found being mate of the second deck a rather dreary duty. All day long she sat at a lonely desk, while platoons went in and out, to class, to mess, leaving her for interminable periods without a sign of life. Had she not been able to hear her own regular breathing, she wouldn't have been at all sure that somehow or other she had not managed to die in the night, and that this thing in the form of McLeod, helping to maintain a "tight ship," was in reality a specter, doomed to solitary confinement with a log book for a soul mate. The

only break in her somber routine came every hour on the half-hour, when she solemnly lifted the telephone and informed the officer of the watch that "All was secure."

"Secure, my foot," Becky thought. "I am like little pieces flying off at a tangent. What do they expect me to find in the rooms when I inspect them every hour. Who would want to do anything insecure in one of those rooms anyhow? Can you imagine someone sneaking up here with faggots and a flint and starting a bonfire, just for the devilish fun of it?" She wondered if she would remember to get Perkins up in the morning at 5:30, to secure her. Supposing the alarm clock didn't go off and she and Perkins slept blissfully on, and the second deck of the "*U.S.S. Northrop*" was left in pristine bareness. She made a careful entry in the log book—"Hourly inspection—all secure."

When she looked up, Miss Lawrence stood at the desk. Becky sprang to her feet. "Good morning, Lieutenant."

"Good morning. Will you accompany me with pencil and paper on inspection?"

Becky picked up a pad and pencil. This promised to be an enlightening performance. She knew how much housecleaning Ann would have done without any help. She would have made both beds with her inimitable corners, swept the dust into a neat pile, and forgotten to pull up the shade.

Miss Lawrence set Becky a quick pace, performing her routine with illuminating precision—scuffling across the decks of the quarters to detect dirt beneath her shoes; wiping her gloved hand across desks, bunk rails and chests of drawers, and inspecting it with raised brows. Her practiced eye missed nothing, and she would turn abruptly to Becky and dictate a memo to the seaman in charge of the room that left no doubt about the thoroughness of her inspection; and even less about her opinion of the quarters.

The closer they approached 45, the more erratic Becky's pulse became, as she thought of the memo that Miss Lawrence might order her to leave for Ann. They went into Perkins' room, which had all the earmarks of the Mississippi Valley after a flood. For some reason, Perkins must have miscalculated inspection. Everywhere was evidence of a hasty change of clothes and the text books of the morning classes were strewn across the bed. A raspberry smear disfigured the towel hanging on the rod above her bed.

Miss Lawrence drew back from the sight as from an offensive odor. "Tell Perkins to scrub this room, wash her towel and then report to me—with the towel." For a moment she closed her eyes. "I will inspect the rest of the building when I feel stronger," she said, smiling.

Becky stood aside for her to pass, but Miss Lawrence walked down the passageway beside her. "Tell me about yourself, McLeod," she said.

The question startled Becky. It was the last one in the world she expected in Northampton. It was they who should tell her about herself. "What do you want to know about me, Miss Lawrence?"

"How did you happen to join the Waves?"

"It's a very, very long story," Becky said quietly.

"Oh!" Miss Lawrence replied and looked a little embarrassed.

"Ye gods, you can't tell an officer to mind her own business," Becky thought suddenly, and then added, "They were doing the sort of war job I wanted to do. I was farming and I was very restless at it. I realized that I'd never be satisfied until I was closer to the war than I was, so—I sent in my application."

"But you were in England," Miss Lawrence said. "Think how much closer you were to the war then." Becky was glad that her Company Commander's eyes held only surprise and a discreet question.

She twisted the pencil in her fingers. "I would have stayed there if I could have. Mother wanted to come back. I had to bring her."

"Oh, I see."

"I was there, too," Miss Lawrence told Becky. "But the war had hardly begun when I left." Her brows puckered. "I spent my last night in England sleeping in a bed with an English woman, with a bolster between us. There was an air-raid alarm during the night and I

woke up and found the English woman clutching the bolster for dear life and murmuring 'God's will be done.' "

Becky's complete amazement was evident in her face. Could this be Lieutenant Lawrence, and was she, Becky, on watch at Northrop, or was it all some fantastic dream? And was it Seaman McLeod to whom Miss Lawrence had made this extraordinary statement? "Tell me about it," she said impulsively, then added, in hasty embarrassment, "I mean if you don't mind, Lieutenant. It sounds terribly interesting."

Miss Lawrence looked at her hands and then into space. Her eyes always came back to her audience with startling suddenness. "It was more annoying than interesting. I couldn't get a room in Southampton unless I was willing to share it with someone. I was so tired, having sat up on the train all night, I was glad to share a room with anyone—nearly anyone," she amended. "One got used to sleeping in crowds in England, but this woman's idea of a crowd was one American, and her way of showing her prejudice was to place the bolster between us—a stuffed wall of Jericho, I suppose. It was like sleeping with two people instead of one. But I learned long ago never to question the English. I couldn't stand it for long, though, so I got dressed at four in the morning and sat in the lobby with the potted palms until the tender left." She sighed and her shoulders rose and fell in a gesture of resignation. "Coming

home, I shared a dark corner in the hold with a nun. She was very sweet, but it was an odd experience."

Becky was even less certain that she wasn't dreaming, for only in a dream could she see Miss Lawrence and a nun evacuating England together in the hold of a ship. She didn't know what to say. Miss Lawrence had suddenly become a very human person to her, and in civilian life, on equal status, she would have liked to pursue the subject of England and the war on a personal basis.

She gave up. "Do you like England, Lieutenant?"

Miss Lawrence nodded, and it seemed to Becky that she withdrew a little into a shell. "Very, very much." Her eyes were veiled by the thoughts she had no intention of expressing. Becky knew the signs. She, herself, had so often looked at people, and seen in their faces only the reflection of nostalgic memories and hopeless longing. She knew it was better, then, to say nothing—to let the conversation fade out like a travelogue announcer's voice.

For an instant their eyes met in understanding, and then Miss Lawrence drew herself up rather stiffly becoming again the Company Commander, and left the deck.

The rest of the day dragged. Becky made her hourly inspections. "If only something would jump out of a closet at me—" she thought, "like Great-Aunt Augusta—just to relieve the boredom."

But Great-Aunt Augusta didn't jump out of a closet at her. Instead, at five-thirty, there was a crash like the sound of tin and glass and a falling body. Becky jumped involuntarily. In the stillness of the passageway it was as startling as the first blast of the air-raid siren. She went to the bannister and looked down upon the prostrate body of her roommate. Ann lay on the landing in a pool of broken glass and furniture polish and seemed to be pinned there by an O'Cedar mop. Becky flew down the stairs and skirted the slippery polish that had spread like a yellow lake along the landing and was dripping down the stairs to the deck below.

"Here, give me your hand," she offered, but Ann was struggling to her feet, somewhat like a horse that has gone down and can't quite regain its footing. Her shoes and hands were covered with the sticky liquid, but most alarming was her face. It was the color of the mop handle—a bright magenta that clashed with the fire in her eyes.

She hoisted her body, ponderous in a heavy coat, to all fours, then rose laboriously to an upright position. "I don't see why I have to do everything!" she cried tensely. "No wonder things like this happen.

Becky couldn't keep a smile off her face; she felt she had done well not to laugh at the sight of Ann, unharmed and utterly ludicrous.

"What do you mean—everything?"

"All the darned shopping——"

Becky started to speak.

"Don't tell me you've been slaving over a desk all day."

"Well, pet, I have. Can you imagine asking to be secured to buy an O'Cedar mop? Miss Lawrence can't quite understand me as it is."

Ann kicked at a piece of glass underfoot and rubbed at the polish on her coat. "The devil with this—I made the gesture—see how near home you can get with a bottle of polish." She spread her arms in despair and pushed her ski cap on the back of her head. Suddenly she looked like a bewildered moonfaced child. "How am I going to clean up the mess? My feet hurt and I'm dead, and now I have to polish the whole building."

Two equally weary seamen, laden with bundles, plodded slowly up the "ladder," halted at sight of the wreckage and burst into laughter.

Ann jammed her hands down on her hips. "All right, then, how about a little Navy spirit—how about three of us cleaning it up instead of one? I'd hate for Lawrence to know who did it when she slips up tonight and breaks her neck——"

"Or when an entire platoon hits this ski slope and does the rest of the ladder on their backsides," Becky suggested.

"Back to your post, seaman!" Ann waved her aside, took off her coat and rolled up her sleeves. "Guess I'll

have to use our new dust cloths." She picked up a sodden paper bag and looked ruefully at the contents. "A week's pay shot to the dogs!"

The two weary seamen deposited their packages on the upper landing and went for brooms. The last time Becky peered at them over the bannister they were still on hands and knees, mopping the deck, the ladder, and their brows. Ann was majestically wielding the broom, clamping the dust pan steady with one foot while she swept a pile of glass into it.

* * * * *

"Have you wound the clock?" Becky asked.

"Yes, and put the cat out and left a note for the milkman," Ann mumbled.

"I'm glad this watch is over," Becky went on. She felt released, conversational and ready for bed. This was a pleasant fatigue. She would chat with Ann for a while and in the middle of it they would both fall asleep. Ann would mumble an incoherent reply, the upper bunk would sag another inch, and another day would have ended. "I wonder what Perkins will do to the 'U.S.S. *Northrop*' when she takes over tomorrow," she mused.

"If you remember to get her up," Ann replied, "she will probably do a first class job of sabotage."

Becky set the alarm for five-thirty.

It seemed to her that she hadn't been asleep five minutes when the alarm went off. She groped around the floor for the clock, shut it off and scrambled to her feet before she was tempted to turn over and go back to sleep. Ann grunted a complaint at the disturbance.

"I must be sick," Becky thought. "No one could sleep six hours and still be as sleepy as this." She put on her dressing-gown and stumbled through the dark passageway to Perkins' quarters. Perkins, sleeping like the dead, was difficult to find beneath the covers. Becky shook the inert form and felt a tentative movement. "Thank heaven, she's alive."

Perkins suddenly shot upright. "What's the matter!" Her voice grated on the still air.

"Time to get up," Becky whispered. "Hurry up. You're Queen of the May now, and I want to go back to bed."

Perkins followed her out of the room and together they tip-toed to the mate's desk. "I've got to be sure you know what to do and then you have to secure me," Becky told her. She looked at her own watch casually and then more closely. It had stopped at two-thirty. Perkins had looked, too.

"But it's only two-thirty!" she whispered.

"It's stopped." Becky smiled indulgently.

"Stopped, my eye," Perkins bleated. "The sweep hand's going. It couldn't be stopped. You've gotten me up at two-thirty in the morning! And I was so tired."

There was something so pathetic about the tone of her voice that Becky was embarrassed. She looked at her watch, saw the sweep hand accusingly ticking off the seconds. "But I set the alarm clock, Perkins. And it rang at five-thirty."

"But it's really only two-thirty. Everything's wrong." Perkins was close to tears.

Becky patted her on the shoulder. "I'm terribly sorry. Go on back to bed, and I'll get up again at the right time."

Perkins cut a distrustful eye at Becky.

"Don't worry. It will be five-thirty next time," Becky promised.

Not until the next morning was Becky able to solve the mystery of the alarm clock. Ann had wound it, as she said, but it had stopped during the day and she had forgotten to set it. There was nothing contrite in her admission. When she heard what had happened to Perkins, she collapsed on the bed in a fit of hysterical laughter.

"How the Navy warps our sense of humor," Becky commented drily.

7

BECKY FELT nervous about the meeting with Sam. She wanted to talk to Ann about it, but Ann was too practical about such things to have any sympathy with the complicated reasoning that set up such a barrier between two Kentucky neighbors.

Becky ventured one remark, putting it out as a feeler. "A friend of mine's coming down this afternoon, Ann, and I don't want to see him."

"Him! You don't want to see him? A man, after all these weeks in this female seminary."

"Oh, do try to understand, Ann. If you're drooling at the mouth, you can have him."

"Don't say that too loud, bub. I'm likely to forget Alan."

"What's the use of talking to you sensibly. You sound like a frustrated spinster."

"Which I am," Ann conceded. "But tell me. Why don't you want to see him?"

"Ann, he hasn't what I like."

"Meaning?"

"I'll tell you after I've seen him. It's not fair to tell you before I do. And if you're perishing with curiosity, he's meeting me at the Hotel. You might sort of amble in around four o'clock."

"Honey, I'll be there, in my best Navy blue winter costume. I warn you, I'll snare him if I can."

"I have no doubt you will," Becky said.

Ann groaned. "Now you take all the fun out of it."

"You see how well I know you," Becky laughed.

"All right." Ann wagged her finger. "But the laugh's really on you. *What* are you going to do with him? Hold hands in the movie, or take him for a walk? Or perhaps sit on a bench on the Smith College Campus?"

"Frankly, I don't know. Where does anyone take a friend?"

Ann shook her head. "I've wondered the same thing about Alan. He threatens to come up here, and I wouldn't know how to cope with him on a formal basis. You know—'Mr. Masterson, would you care for a cup of tea?' 'Ah, my dear, from your sweet hand, yes. And would it be presumptuous, Miss Ann, if I should ask you to play that lovely Bach prelude on the harpsichord?' Every time I think of it, I stall him off, and he's beginning to accuse me of falling in love with the drill master."

"Of course," Becky mused, "I might turn him over

to a fascinating seaman who could make the Hotel have all the allure of the Stork Club."

"Where have you seen such a seaman?" Ann demanded. "Emmy Braddock or Katherine Goss might do it. They could soothe his soul with sweet music."

"But even Goss and Braddock couldn't keep 500 seamen from joining in the chorus."

* * * * *

Sam's arrival was the only thing about the Navy that made Becky feel she was back in school again. Having threatened Ann with a fiendish death if she ever mentioned his name, she was able to dress without the embarrassing assistance of all her deck mates. But it didn't prevent Ann's fussing over her like a mother hen with a chick.

"Now don't be too hard on the poor guy," Ann said. "Come three weeks from now, you will look back on this as Nirvana."

Becky made a wry face. She was trying hard not to give Ann any hint of the conflict of emotions that was making a South Pacific battle area of her brain and body. For some reason, for which she would always blame Sam, his coming had taken her back to sudden unexpected meetings with Ronnie. And she resented his making the comparison enter her mind. But she couldn't help thinking of the Sunday in Burford, when a frowsy

chambermaid had brought her a telegram as she sat up in bed with a tray of English breakfast—cold toast in a rack, over-fried eggs, coffee bitter with chickory and black as the ink in a third class hotel, and a pot of marmalade that William the Conqueror had brought from the Continent. She had put the tray aside, leapt from bed and dressed as well as she could in a suit designed for walking in the Cotswolds. All morning she had paced from the fireplace to the window, watching for the blue canvas top of his Bentley. And when it had pulled up slowly in front of the hotel, and she had seen him get out—wonderful, long-legged, hatless Ronnie, she had felt her knees turn to water. They had met in the small, dusty lobby of the hotel like two strangers because neither had had the courage to trust the understanding of the anemic, pale-eyed Boniface. They had shaken hands.

Ronnie said, "How are you, Becky?"

And she had answered, as Great Aunt Augusta might have done, "Very well, and you?"

But Boniface had not seen the glance that had passed between them, and if he had seen it, he would never have understood. Such glances were beyond his experience. There wasn't any question of what they should do—how she should entertain him. They could have sat in the hotel, under the curious, penetrating eye of Boniface, and told each other the answer to a hundred mysteries. But they hadn't.

They had been content to walk, hand in hand, after they had climbed their first stone wall, and at first, they hadn't talked of themselves at all. They had talked of the possibility of war, of what they would do if war broke out, and that was the first time Ronnie had asked her to marry him, so that they could take their chances together when the time came to chance everything. She had laughed. How well she remembered it, because Chamberlain had just come back from Munich, and war seemed the most unlikely thing in the world. It wasn't Chamberlain's fault that she laughed. He had been sincere in his faith. He had been earnest about preventing war, but he couldn't, in his frail human faith, anticipate the ambition of the Austrian maniac, or the inborn militaristic urge of the Prussian.

Ronnie had looked at her strangely when she had laughed. "Do you believe all this nonsense that war won't come?"

"I don't think it will, Ronnie. Not now."

"But darling, nothing in God's world can prevent it."

"They'll do anything to keep it from happening."

"Your 'they' is as vague as it deserves to be, Becky. The only chance 'they' had to prevent war happened a long time ago—when the Germans occupied the Ruhr and the Saar. That was the time to prevent it."

She had smiled, like the ignoramus that she was, and the smile shamed her now—because Ronnie had been right—as he was about everything about them. She

should have married him that very day. They should have opened the window that night and looked down together on the blue top of the Bentley, and talked of the things that he knew were coming. And then they would have had their night to themselves. If she had only had Ronnie once, she would have had something to keep in her heart for the rest of time, and the duration plus six months would have been so many words. He would have given her the fortitude to face them calmly, knowing that, since she had had what was rightfully hers, she must try to give back a little of the assurance of that knowledge.

She would never forget the acute unhappiness of his leaving. She had stood on the pavement, watching the Bentley drive off, and had thought, "There goes everything to make you really happy, you half-witted fool, and you have stood solemnly on ceremony and fear. It would serve you right if war should break out tonight and they blew Burford into shambles."

But she hadn't listened to herself. She had gambled with time and had lost. And now, she was dressing to meet Sam Wilding, whom Ronnie would have despised; who had enough sense to know what she was thinking when she had stalked off the hemp field that day in Kentucky. It wasn't anything to her credit, but a great deal to his discredit that she had to stalk away from him to bring him to a sense of what he should do.

Becky tried to carry on an animated conversation with the seamen she met at the Hotel, but it was difficult to do with one eye on the door. In spite of everything she anticipated, she was relieved when she saw him come in. He looked quickly about him, a little puzzled by the women in uniform—the Officer of the Day who stared openly and a trifle suspiciously at him; the yeoman who gazed, frankly interested, at his long, slender figure. Becky thought he returned the gaze with Virginia gallantry. And then he saw her, and the way his face lit up embarrassed her.

She went forward to meet him. It angered her to feel so glad to see him. She mustn't start off being emotional about Kentucky, the way she was about England, so that a mere association with the place overrode all sense of judgment and balance.

"How are you, Becky?"

"Fine, Sam. You look very well in uniform. I see you haven't lost your Kentucky tan the way I have."

"Where's your sailor suit," he asked. "I thought you'd be covered with brass buttons by now."

She laughed nervously. "Brass buttons on a seaman? We don't get our uniforms till next week. Then I send all this civilian raiment home to be burned. I'm not at all sure it won't walk home by itself."

Sam looked about him like a prisoner contemplating escape. "A friend of mine lent me his car. Where shall we go?"

"There aren't many places to go."

"Shall we ride around until we think of one? I believe we can ride for twenty miles before I have just enough gas left to get back to Boston."

"Yes. Let's do. It seems years since the time you could just ride around." She was glad that Ann hadn't come to have a look at him. It would have meant an argument far into the night, for Sam had everything that would appeal to Ann's fairly superficial judgment of the male sex—what she called "a uniform figure," unstudied poise, sophistication of a casual variety. Ann would never object to the things about him that Becky did: the casualness with which he faced the crises of living. He was meant to ride over a farm with nothing more serious to think about than foaling mares and the improvement of crops, assuming that the hard work and most of the worrying was done by a multitude of farm hands.

They took a road Becky didn't recognize and drove aimlessly along. For several minutes Sam was silent. Suddenly he took off his cap, tossed it into the back of the car and ran his fingers through his hair. "Do you ever have a wild urge to get the wind in your hair?" he asked.

"All Waves are going to be bald when the war is over," Becky said. "There is going to be a terrific boom in transformations." She took off her hat, too, and settled down comfortably. It was fun to see something be-

sides the Smith College campus and Main street. "How do you like the Army?" she asked.

"Frankly, it isn't the life I would choose," he told her. "But I suppose it's the life I ought to live till the war's over. How about you?"

"I have to admit I like the Navy—I like everything about it. It's put an end to so many unpleasant things for me."

"Such as——"

"Oh, my restlessness and indecision; a feeling that I wasn't doing anything very definitely connected with the war."

"What could be more definitely connected with it than farming?" He put the question belligerently, she thought.

"I admit it's connected, Sam. It just didn't satisfy me."

"Personally, I'd rather grow things than kill them," he said bluntly.

She looked at him curiously. "That had all the earmarks of a conscientious objector."

He laughed. "I haven't got the guts to be a conscientious objector."

She felt herself stiffen involuntarily, and it annoyed her that she should. One had to discuss these things calmly to make sense of them; not fly off the handle and be emotionally outraged. "What connection is there between guts and a conscientious objector, Sam?"

"Don't you think it takes guts to face the kind of censure you get for that conviction?"

"Of a certain kind, perhaps. But it seems to me in that case that fear is stronger than courage."

"I don't know, Becky. On the face of it, it may seem that way. But a really strong aversion to killing can be a damned potent thing."

"I'd rather kill than be killed, if the things I represented were worth hanging on to."

"I admit that. *If* you could hang on to them. We had a go at it in the last war, and here we are, at it again. You can't exterminate a whole race, and as long as there are Prussians, there'll be war. As long as there are Japs, there'll be treachery. You can kill off this generation, but what about the next? Vengeance breeds spiritual maggots, and they'll gnaw away at any peace structure you set up."

She had to admit to herself a certain amount of truth in his reasoning. "Then why did you join the Army?"

He ignored her question and pointed to a sweep of woods. "Are you game to walk in the cold?"

"It's just what I need."

He pulled up on a side road and stopped the car.

The ground was hard underfoot, but the soft fragrance of the woods was everywhere like a balm. They followed what seemed to be an equestrian path, and went for a long way in silence, conscious of the lessen-

ing of tension in the absolute peace of the country. She had almost forgotten the question she had asked, when he answered it suddenly, like a small boy making an irrelevant observation. "I'm not a conscientious objector, or I suppose I might find the courage to keep out of uniform. If, as I think, it takes courage. But I do agree with you on one point about C.O.'s. I think ninety per cent of them are scared to death. It's the genuine C.O. I feel sorry for."

She felt infinite relief. There was something depressing about a man reluctantly in uniform. "I can't imagine anyone being a coward and foxhunting the way you do, Sam. Certainly not on that wild bay mare you ride."

"She's all right if you know how to handle her. You can't ride her on a curb. She wants a lot of gentle coaxing. No, I don't think I'm a physical coward."

"Trying to mean that you're a mental coward?" She cut a disbelieving eye at him.

"Yes, definitely one. I should have gone on farming when you come right down to it. I could grow what's needed and afford to take a loss on the farm."

"The men who can't fight can farm," she said laconically.

"That would be all right, if you had enough men who were too old to fight and still young enough to stand the gaff. Farming's no job for an old man, with

the labor shortage what it is. I might as well be honest with you. You got me into this soldier suit."

She supposed he meant her to feel proud, as if she should chalk up a triumph. But there was nothing like pride in the effect his confession had upon her. She walked along at his side, wishing that she dared ask him to take her home this soon. Everything he said went against her grain. The simple fact was that they seemed to think alike about nothing.

"You're angry with me," he said, after a while.

She flared up like dry kindling. "Now why the devil should I be angry with you. It doesn't make any difference to me why you joined the Army. I think you should have—long ago. Now you have. Let's drop it."

He turned sharply and pinioned her shoulders in strong hands. She felt the blood drain from her face. "Please, Sam. You know better than to use a curb on me."

"You're going to listen to me!" She had never before seen his lazy, amused eyes harden. The muscular ridges in his jaw moved beneath the skin.

"I can listen as I was."

"I want to look at you while I tell you this." His grip tightened, digging into her flesh. She felt her quick anger settle into hot, speechless rage.

"That look you gave me in the hemp field. Do you think I didn't get it? I knew only too well why you went off. You thought I was afraid to fight. I didn't forget

it. I couldn't think of anything else for days. It wouldn't have made any difference to me if everyone in the country had walked off on me. But it made a difference when you did. There's nothing on God's earth I'm afraid to fight for if I think it's right. Without opening your mouth, you made me see what the score was. The more I thought of it, the surer I was I'd been thinking the wrong way. I'd try to argue myself out of it, and then I'd see you, working like a man because you couldn't do what I could. I knew I couldn't live with you for the rest of our lives unless I made that right. You see," he relaxed his grip and gave her a crooked, half-embarrassed smile, "you were thinking things about me that weren't true."

His words bored into her anger. Confusing, paradoxical thoughts stirred themselves into a turmoil. "What do you mean 'live with me for the rest of our lives'?" Why, out of all he had said, had she thrown that back at him? She knew what he meant. She could see it in his eyes when he was speaking of other things. What she thought of him had hurt him because he loved her. Ronnie and now Sam! How different they were. How utterly and hopelessly different. Ronnie had been so right about everything; Sam so wrong. But he loved her enough to try to think as she did; to toss away all his peace-loving convictions to do the thing that was right in her eyes. He must love her a great deal to do that.

She had meant it when she had said that no man could ride to hounds the way he did and be a moral weakling. She remembered following his broad, supple back on a forty-minute point one autumn day. His mare didn't want to cross wire. Sam wanted her to cross it. There was no other way out. Becky stood aside, watching him coax the nervous horse over the barrier. There was no fear for himself in Sam's confident figure, yet wire so often meant crushing death. He wanted his mare to jump what he asked of her; he wanted her to be confident of herself. Becky knew, as she watched him taking refusal after refusal without losing his temper, never tightening the gentle pressure of his hands, that his capacity for patience must be infinite. Why, then couldn't she admit that she knew he loved her when he forced her to face him as if he were meeting an ultimate challenge?

He dropped his hands. The winter wind stirred the hair above his forehead. "It's pretty simple, Becky. I hope some day you will marry me. Surely you knew that."

She found that it was easier to face him now. He had spoken to her almost as Ronnie might have done. His voice was as gentle as his hands had been that day of fox-hunting. She folded her fingers behind her, unconscious that they strained against one another until the knuckles were white. "How was I to know that, Sam?"

He laughed. "I thought you could tell. I thought you would know it when I telephoned you."

"Well, I didn't," she said.

"It's true. I'd ask you to tell me now what chance there was, if I didn't know what your answer would be. So I'm not going to ask you. You see, I am a moral coward. I'm waiting for the propitious moment. Do you think the day I get sailing orders I might be lucky enough to broach the subject successfully?"

She never knew what emotion must have shown in her face at that moment. Whatever it was, Sam interpreted it as he saw it, perhaps as she felt it. "I don't know, Sam. You must give me a chance to think. You took me for a walk and you've put me through the gamut of all sorts of emotions."

"All right. But you will have dinner with me?"

"I'm starved," she confessed.

"May I have something to take back with me to Dow Field?"

"What?"

"You know it's full of Waacs. But my loyalties are so set in their ways, I can't make time with any of them." He moved very close to her. "I don't think I want to. I'm rather sold on Waves. There aren't many of them up there, but they all look alike—they look like you. That's a rather strange coincidence, isn't it? Darling, if I use a snaffle on you, do you think you might kiss me goodbye?"

"I think a Pelham might do it, under the circumstances—provided it doesn't become a habit."

His mouth was like his hands, gentle and coaxing, and his arms had an impelling strength. They stood, for a moment, with the wind whipping their faces, and she wondered, during that incredibly short time, what there could be about him to so completely annihilate all the significant shortcomings of an hour before.

Ann had been discreet enough not to turn up at the Hotel for a look at Sam on Saturday, but she made up for it on Sunday morning. At seven-thirty she woke up and leaned over her bunk. "What time did you get in, dear?"

"You know perfectly well what time I got in. Twelve—right on the nose."

"Whose nose? Don't think I didn't hear you fumbling around. Was it worth it?"

"Well, yes and no."

"Don't give me that kind of evasive answer."

"It's not meant to be evasive. If I knew, I'd tell you."

Ann grimaced. "Something happened. What was it?"

It wasn't until they went to dinner at Beckman's that night that Becky gave Ann any satisfaction about her day with Sam. Ann avoided the subject as if she were biding her time.

"Ann, I don't know what's the matter with me. Do you suppose living up here, completely wrapped up in yourself and what you are doing, suddenly takes a logical turn back to normal civilian reactions?"

"Sam made love to you," Ann said bluntly.

"You make me sick. You put everything so fundamentally."

"All right, pet. It is fundamental, isn't it?"

"I suppose so."

"You are determined not to give him a break?"

"I don't love him."

Ann took a large bite of apple pie à la mode and made a face as if she had just swallowed gall and wormwood. "I don't mean," she said with a full mouth, "to interfere in your affairs. But you can't live with a ghost for the rest of your life."

"I know that," Becky said.

"Then don't expect everyone to measure up to that English gent."

"I don't expect them to."

"There's only one like that in a lifetime. I wish I had a chance at one. Just one *homme fatal* in my life would suit me to perfection. I could mope around like Camille and hint at all sorts of exotic goings on. But I'm darned lucky to have Alan."

"I don't know, Ann. Alan's not exactly out of luck. If you can see through him the way you apparently see through me, I think he has most of the luck."

Ann pushed the remains of the pie crust around the plate. "You're about equally obvious," she said.

Becky leaned across the table and met her eye squarely. "There's one thing we must get clear. I am not in love with Sam. Even if he thinks I was hatched in Heaven, I'm still not in love with him."

"I know. I know," Ann said soothingly. "You are carrying a torch."

Becky tossed her head irritably. "You make it sound so unattractive."

"All right, I mean to," Ann countered. "Don't think I haven't known what's been eating at you. I haven't mentioned it because I didn't figure it was any of my business. But one way and another, I've gotten to like you, and I hate to see you act like every other unattached female whose only love has gone down the ways."

"Ann! How can you talk like that?"

"I'll talk any way to make you see reason."

Becky knew from the tiny beads of perspiration breaking out on Ann's forehead, that for the first time since they had met, one of them was risking a great deal of harmony to give an opinion.

"A bird in the hand, Becky."

Becky laughed. "You're the most crass woman I've ever met."

"But you do agree with me?"

"No. But I admit your intentions have something to recommend them."

* * * * *

Becky couldn't help feeling that Sam Harris had missed a good bet when he didn't see Ann being fitted for a uniform. The conflict of personalities evident between Ann and the tailor was classic. It would have done well for a scene in any Broadway comedy, but, unfortunately for the theater, only Becky and the uniform officer saw it.

Ann went on the theory that if she really took a size 40, a size 38 was a perfect fit. The tailor stuck to the theory that anyone who took a size 40 couldn't be comfortable in anything less than a 42. The compromise, after a verbal battle of fisticuffs, was something that hung on her like a gunny sack.

Ann took a long look at herself and submitted the evidence to the officer in charge of uniforms. "Miss Clinton, you wouldn't send anything out into the world looking like this," she pleaded.

Miss Clinton looked at her as if the Mad Hatter had suddenly popped up out of Alice in Wonderland. Without comment, she beckoned the fitter to her.

"I don't think this fits," she said.

"But how is she going to work in it, if it is any tighter?" he asked, plaintively.

"She isn't going to dig ditches, Joseph."

Joseph cast critical and wholly impersonal eyes over Ann's figure. "Perhaps a little in here and there," he suggested. "But only a little."

Ann followed his eyes disconsolately. It was perfectly all right to destroy all the glamour she could lay claim to, if it would do the Navy any good. But it didn't seem to her that it would jeopardize the war effort, if she insisted upon having a semblance of bust line. She tried pulling the jacket in from the back, just as a suggestion. Joseph winced. "Well, maybe not quite so much," she compromised, "but you've got to give me some kind of figure, even if I look like a snow man in a blackout."

"Barrett!" Miss Clinton cried.

"I'm sorry, ma'am. But I don't see why the thing has to look like a nightshirt."

"It won't when it's finished, if you'll just be patient. You know it can't fit like the paper on the wall."

"I know that, ma'am. But it doesn't have to fit like a dust sheet."

Becky entered the breach with misgivings. "Ann, for heaven's sake, stop complaining." While Joseph engaged Miss Clinton in graphic explanations, she whispered. "You can have it fitted at the two-minute egg place."

"Do you think I'd have this thing fitted in that goldfish bowl?"

"No one's going to see you, Ann."

"No. Not a living soul except the urchins who giggle themselves into hiccups at the window."

"I'll stand in front of you," Becky promised.

"You, you," Ann wailed. "You'd cover me as well as a willow in the dead of winter. I tell you I won't go out in this thing. And have you seen the hat on me?" She barked it out like a challenge.

"No," Becky said. "What's the matter with it?"

"Wouldn't you think they could make some allowance for the average face? First they sew me into this shroud and then they top it off with that cabby's bonnet."

Ann shook her head patiently. "If Mainbocher didn't have you in mind when he designed the uniform, Ann, you must try to be tolerant. He did the best that he could."

"All right. All right. Just because you look like Venus de Milo with both arms intact isn't any reason to be smug."

"Honey, I'm not trying to be smug, but you are making a spectacle of yourself. Do you realize that every fitter in the place is standing in the doorway?"

"Why shouldn't they? What could be a better lesson? Listen pet, I have to go home and face all of Greenville in this thing. I have to face Doug in it. Do you think I fancy a long and fruitless spinsterhood?"

Miss Clinton settled the argument. When Joseph

had refitted the uniform, Ann could stand up in it, but she wouldn't have liked to wager a plugged nickel that she could sit down.

Becky felt that uniforms affected the seamen like a cold shower. The most frivolous of them were sobered, as if, suddenly, out of chaotic thoughts, a very clear purpose had emerged. Where before they had been a heterogeneous mass of seamen, overnight they became a unit, ultimately conscious that they were all dressed in blue for one reason. They marched differently; they bore themselves differently. They were proud. Even Ann, for all her complaining, swung along with a spirit in her stride that little resembled her usual plodding step.

When they came up Sunshine Mountain, even in the rain, like a flock of wet crows in havelocks, that covered their hats and framed their faces, singing "baked beans for lunch" they marched with a dignity and pride that was deeply thrilling.

Becky couldn't help but think of the desperate May nights of bombing in London, when it seemed that no square inch of ground was spared; and how much she would have liked to have had "the black crows" standing by with her. They would have been so willing to go out into those nights of death and pandemonium, to fight against destruction as women could. Many of them had talked about London to her, at first tenta-

tively, as if they feared to trespass on some hidden ground; and then avidly, asking searching questions, when they realized that she didn't mind talking about it. Some wanted duty in England, some in the South Pacific, some in Africa. Only the cold countries were out of favor, but that was obviously because the temperature in Northampton had dropped to zero and was still dropping.

One February morning they formed for muster in air so cold that fingers ached through the heaviest fur-lined gloves. The squads were rows of black, featureless forms in havelocks pinned above noses, leaving only a small opening for eyes to peer out. Seamen's shallow crowned hats, affording little protection against weather like this, had been abandoned. An order of the day put them into Midshipmen's hats before they were due to wear them—and threw Ann into a fit of depression.

"Look at me!" she had cried, staring at her round face in the mirror. "How can I live for the duration in this thing?"

"Maybe there'll be a drought," Becky had consoled her, "and you won't ever have to wear a havelock."

Ann shook her head. "Just my luck it'll rain till the war ends."

"You don't want to be a seaman the rest of your life."

"I'd settle for a commission and a seaman's hat. Why can't I look like you do in yours?"

By the time they had marched to the Hotel for breakfast there were already several frostbite casualties. Katherine Goss went up and down the waiting line pointing at her nose. It was dead white and swollen.

"Is it going to drop off?" she kept asking. All the humor had been frightened out of her.

"Put snow on it, Goss. Don't get near the fire."

Miss Lawrence came face to face with her, stepped back in alarm and whisked her across the street to the Dispensary. Everyone was nervous and kept clutching ears and kneading numb fingers. As people will, at such times, they swapped horrifying stories of features dropping off, one by one, after exposure to sub-zero weather. Most of them were afraid to leave the warmth of the Hotel. Becky "hupped" a silent platoon back to Northrop in record time, but even at that there were some strange-looking ears when hats and havelocks came off. Ann complained of her knees and walked like an old woman. Finally, when they swelled to startling proportions and she could no longer pull her lisle stockings over them, she was sent to the infirmary.

During the four days that Ann was gone, selection interviews began. Becky had no idea she would miss Ann so much. Somehow she couldn't talk things over with her deck mates as she and Ann had done, knowing that they reacted alike to so many problems and that

when they differed, their arguments would never hold rancor. She made daily trips to the infirmary, where Ann lay propped up surrounded by books, half-written letters and the scent of Patou's "Joy."

"Who are you expecting?" Becky asked. "You smell like a perfume shop on the Rue de Rivoli."

"I'm trying to be an interesting invalid—like Camille. There's the most divine doctor taking care of me. Isn't it lucky I haven't anything but frostbitten knees!"

"Do they hurt very much, Ann?" Becky pulled up a chair and sat down.

Ann nodded as solemnly as an owl. "Frankly, they hurt like the devil. They have me kind of scared. I don't think the swelling's ever going down. They throb all the time."

"They'll be all right, Ann. Don't worry. The Navy's not going to let you off that easily. Shall I be gay and try to cheer you up or shall I not talk at all?"

"I want to hear what's going on." Ann settled herself to listen. The hospital bed swayed a little like the upper bunk.

"I had a selection interview today. I asked for Personnel, but I don't expect I'll get it."

"Why not?"

"She hinted at Procurement. Thought I ought to be good at that because of the London experience."

"You probably would."

"But it won't get me to England. I'll end up in Cupcake, Nebraska, being the only Wave ever seen in them there parts. Nice old ladies will bring me pie and coffee and tell me all about someone they knew who was a Marinette in the last war. I'll go slowly mad and butt my brains out against an ox-cart."

"Still thinking about England," Ann mused. "Why not Africa? Things are red hot there. I hope I do get into Procurement, but it'll be just my luck for you to get Procurement and me to get Personnel. The only other thing that could possibly be worse would be to get Communications."

"Now I think that *would* be interesting," Becky disagreed. "If I had the brains to learn all that stuff, I'd beg for it. I think it would be as fabulous as Bulldog Drummond to sit there and really know what was going on."

Ann rose up and cast a suspicious eye at her. "Wait a minute! You haven't heard they're going to do anything like that to me, have you?"

Becky shook her head energetically. "I haven't heard a thing about you, honestly."

Ann was getting red in the face. "They can't do it! I've never even been in the same room with a typewriter, or any other mysterious gadgets."

Becky pushed her gently back against the pillows. "Take it easy, Ann. You'll get what you want. You're a cinch for Procurement."

Ann groaned disconsolately. "I want to get out of here and see what's going on."

"I wouldn't be in too big a hurry. We're having a law and organization final on Friday. From all reports it will be a dilly. We are also having a History and Personnel quiz. If I were you I'd nurse the frostbite and hope you won't have to make up the exams. Naturally, for myself, I wish you'd come back and scare Watson away. She engages me in long musical discussions and you know I never was one for symphony and opera. Oh, those few I like, yes—but, ye gods, Watson wants to get right down to bare earth about them—tear them apart and put them together again. I just can't do it. I sit and nod and look wise and know nothing."

"Watson and her darned phonograph!" Ann mumbled.

* * * * *

Ann came back on Thursday, still walking a little like an old woman. Becky suspected that half of it at least was prompted by the excuse from gym and drill that she waved in her hand. Ann would play that for a good thing as long as she could. She had never fancied gym and the square dances that shook the building to its foundations. There was something about gym clothes wholly out of keeping with Ann's personality. The short blue wash dresses and button-leg pants were never designed for her. One leg always hung down

further than the other, and when she leaned over to execute a crab-like exercise, reminiscent of Neanderthal man, she revealed an incredibly broad expanse of blue cotton, strained to the limit in every seam.

Becky had learned the square dance at Ann's side, and it was an experience she would never forget. She had no idea which square dance it was, except that it had something to do with picking up paw-paws. She had never seen a paw-paw and wasn't at all sure it would enhance living to meet one. They were something you stuffed in your pockets, taking little side-steps as you did it. Finally you and your partner swept down an archway of hands like a couple of animated pretzels and the dance started all over again.

Ann had a way of becoming very intense about square dancing. She skipped along the polished floor like heavy artillery moving up the line. A dew of perspiration broke out all over her face. She drew in her full lips, pressing them into a line over her small, even teeth, and when she seized her partner's hand there was a sound as of crunching bone.

Now she could sit on the platform, dangle her legs over the side and watch everyone else struggle with the intricacies of the square dance and "company" gym.

It would always remain a wonder to Becky that a hundred and five women could energetically disport themselves in one gymnasium and not butt one another's brains out, or at least crack a limb here and

there. Ann said it was even more incredible when you were an onlooker, watching hundreds of legs rising and falling with a thud a hair's breadth from the human skulls in the line of fire. And she said that to sit on the platform during the "one, two, three—leap" gave you the sensation of perching on the rim of Vesuvius.

She remained an onlooker by continuing to walk slightly bowlegged and wincing when anyone suggested physical activity. She walked solemnly along the sidewalk, alone in the wake of her platoon. It was the first time she had ever seen the end of the platoon and she told Becky she counted fifteen times that Perkins changed step between Northrop and the Hotel. She said it was even more noticeable now because Perkins remained the goon by virtue of being the only seaman still out of uniform; and having a good deal of suppressed flamboyancy in her nature, a portion of it had suddenly sprung into expression in the form of a bright red jacket. She looked much like a perambulating fire alarm box, but all undaunted, she clung to the red jacket, even refusing to forsake it during the sub-zero spell. It was ironical that Perkins was one of the few who had not succumbed to frostbite.

* * * * *

Ann would have gone back to gym and drill with alacrity to have escaped the examinations on Friday. Neither she nor Becky had quite realized, until they

had gathered their lectures together, what a formidable task they faced in digesting the contents before morning. Ann parcelled out the time at their disposal.

"Fifty minutes this afternoon and an hour tonight. We've got to learn a page every two minutes and look what's on 'em, court martial, crime and punishment, laws on this, laws on that; all the darned Bureaus and their subheadings. Why, I couldn't learn that stuff if I had all night to do it in. And as if that weren't enough, naval history, all the way back to John Paul Jones. The only John Paul Jones I could write a line about comes out of a bottle."

The problem was further complicated by an announcement Miss Lawrence read to the company at lunch muster. "There will be a lecture tonight at 2000 by Norman Field, the *Journal* correspondent, on the war in the South Pacific. Attendance is compulsory. At 1700 there will be selection interviews for the seamen whose names are posted on the bulletin board." She looked up into the frantic eyes of the troops. "I realize you all have examinations tomorrow and you won't have much time to study, but it can't be helped. You'll just have to do your best."

"Not much time to study!" Ann mumbled out of the corner of her mouth. "That disposes neatly of the *only* time we had to study. Well, it was nice having been in the Navy for a while."

"No talking!" Becky commanded, fixing a sympa-

thetic glance on the seamen, whose dispirited expressions were a reflection of her own sinking heart. "They'll hang us all from 'the tree' this time," she thought—the tree being that inglorious growth from whose branches dangled all those with a 2.4 average or under. Three times on the tree, it was hinted, would bilge you out. So far she had managed to avoid it. Ann had decorated it once, for trying to readjust rank and insignia in a Personnel quiz.

Miss Hollinger, the history instructor, gave them the only hopeful suggestion they had all the rest of the black day. "When this happened to us, we took the notes out of our notebook and folded them so they just fitted in the palms of our hands. Of course, I'm not suggesting that you should study during the lecture—" They gave her pathetically grateful glances and took their notebooks apart.

That evening it was noticeable that the regiment, almost to a seaman, listened to the lecture with bowed heads. Embarrassed, angry-faced officers moved surreptitiously up the aisles, wagging their heads, trying futilely to give orders in sign language. The seamen smiled back blandly with "no spikka da English" expressions, and the officers, mentally shrugging their shoulders, gave up. You couldn't enforce an order given by remote control.

If the correspondent was aware of the extraordinary reception of his lecture on the South Pacific battles,

he gave no evidence of it. Nothing daunted, he stuck to his guns for the full two hours, in the best traditions of the press.

That night, Ann and Becky tossed for the flashlight and Ann won. Rigging up a pup tent out of her blanket, she retreated beneath the covers after taps, a dangerously concentrated weight in the center of the springs. So infrequently did she come up for air that Becky poked at her several times, to see if she had smothered to death in the pursuit of strange knowledge.

"Ann!" she called softly, and getting no answer, pushed on the springs. Ann flashed off the light and leaned over the edge of the bunk.

"What's the matter?"

"I can't remember the Chief of Bu Docks."

"Moreel. What are you doing? Lying there and reciting madly to yourself?"

"I'm trying to find out just how much I know so you can tell me what I don't at breakfast tomorrow. I can't remember the tenth naval district, either."

"Mississippi Valley. No. Ye gods, what is it?" She retired under the covers and, after much ruffling of paper, came out again. "The Caribbean. Who would have thought it?" She dangled one hand over the bunk and swung it like a pendulum. "You didn't ask me about my selection interview."

"Oh, Ann, I forgot! What happened? Did you turn on all your charm and wits?"

"Honey, I made it sound as if I could go down there to Greenville and recruit more people than they could use. I didn't come right out and say it, but I hinted I was the Governor's right-hand girl. I even mentioned that I might be willing to go to Charleston if I had to."

Becky was silent for a moment.

"What's the matter?" Ann asked.

"You didn't make them think you'd be doing the Navy a favor, did you?"

"Hardly that, pet!" Ann expostulated. "But I might as well give them what I've got."

"I agree with you." Becky's voice held an apprehensive note. "You know the Navy's policy—there isn't any job that someone else can't do just as well."

Ann groaned. "Now you've got me worrying about that, as if I didn't have enough to worry about."

"Don't be silly." Becky laughed. "You'll get Procurement, all right."

* * * * *

No one went so far as to hope she had done anything spectacular with the examinations on Friday. Ann noticed that the scar over Becky's eye grew redder and redder, as she struggled with hypothetical cases in Navy law. The instructors seemed to have condensed every vestige of material in their courses into the space of an hour, and even those seamen with photographic

minds looked stumped. There were no post-mortems on these tests. It seemed to be the tacit agreement to pretend that they had just been a bad dream, but to keep one eye on the bulletin board for publication of the "tree."

To add to the general tension, it became obvious from Miss Lawrence's uncharacteristic activity that something was in the wind. She pounded her typewriter with incessant clatter, then suddenly rose from her desk and swept out of Northrop to Gillett. Some of her usual poise and impeccable grooming was lacking. With her hat slightly off center and tipped at an angle not compatible with "Personnel," the eagle insignia had a strangely drunken lilt. Miss Lawrence seemed unaware of it. She spoke to no one, but she was seen to mumble to herself.

Gradually, the truth leaked out. No one knew who solved the mystery, but word spread like wildfire that Miss Lawrence was preparing "the list." Advanced indoctrination or communications? Those long sheets of paper held the answer. Everyone was loath to leave the living room, for fear they would be posted in their absence. The list became the abiding topic of conversation, discussed with a mixture of hope and anxiety, not alone because of the division of the class into final categories, but because the Northrop days were about to end.

Becky wasn't honestly sure which concerned her

most—getting into advanced indoctrination or the possibility of leaving Northampton. There was no chance that any of them would stay at Northrop. A new class would be coming in in a week's time and someone else would live in N45. It was even possible that she would be sent to Holyoke and Ann would stay in Northampton. Like college roommates, they would keep in touch with each other for a while and then gradually, under the pressure of work, their ways would diverge. It would seem strange not to finish indoctrination with Ann. There would be no one else like her, and nothing like the "green" days to draw two roommates together in mutual protection against bewilderment and homesickness. Of course, it was possible that they might stay in Northampton together and be room-mates at Capen House, down the street. It was typical, Becky supposed, of what she was to expect from Navy life, that she had lived close to Capen for three weeks and didn't know a soul in the house. It might have been perched in Kamchatka for all she knew of the activity within it, or the seamen there whose trials and emotions and problems must have been identical with her own. Northrop, and everything that happened in it had been her Navy life. Even the Northrop seamen to whom she had spoken less than a dozen words, though daily she worked with them, ate with them and marched beside them, had a very definite place in her scheme of things. They probably would have been surprised

to know it, but the absence of one of them from ranks was a personal concern to her—a break in the ranks of "her platoon" could not go unchallenged.

Suddenly and irrelevantly Becky remembered the night that Mrs. Endicott fell off the ladder to the upper bunk. The mate of the deck had come frantically to her for help. Becky never knew why, unless the mate felt that she was familiar with casualties. She hadn't stopped to put on a dressing-gown. Mrs. Endicott was stretched out on the lower bunk, very white and very still. Becky had always liked her without knowing her very well. She had two sons, one in Iceland and one in the South Pacific. Her husband was at Randolph Field. She had closed her house and joined the Waves, and she could outmarch a lot of seamen young enough to be her daughters. She reminded Becky a little of her own mother. Her fine sensitive hands, turning the pages of the *Bluejackets Manual* or *A Naval History of the United States* seemed to be performing an action as incongruous as if Mrs. McLeod, who couldn't to this day drive a car, should settle herself before the fire with *Popular Mechanics*. There was something in Mrs. Endicott's face that many times had made Becky feel she would be a very satisfactory person to go to in time of trouble.

When she first looked at Mrs. Endicott, apparently as lifeless as a codfish in a frying pan, she felt a moment of acute panic that she had difficulty in keeping

out of her expression. She must seem as calm as they apparently expected her to be.

"What happened?" she asked.

One of Mrs. Endicott's roommates, wild-eyed and nearly inarticulate, gave her a disjointed picture of the accident. "She said she felt faint, and I tried to make her take the lower bunk. She—wouldn't do it. And the ladder slipped off. I mean when she climbed up it wasn't hitched onto the rail. Anyhow, it fell sideways, and we tried to catch it, I mean her. But we couldn't and she fell on her back. We got her into the bunk there, but she hasn't come to, yet."

Becky pieced the explanation together. She would wait for five minutes and then call Miss Lawrence. One didn't take chances with people who fell on their backs. She felt infinite relief when Mrs. Endicott's eyes fluttered, gradually came into focus and then, surprisingly, she smiled.

"Oh, dear! What's happened to me?" she asked.

Becky sat on the bed beside her. "You fell down and tried to break your crown. But you didn't." She took one of Mrs. Endicott's nice hands in her own.

"How do you feel?"

"I don't know." Mrs. Endicott shook her head. "Sort of woozy. But I'm all right."

"Of course you are." Becky felt suddenly that Mrs. Endicott would be all right if she had to sit on her bed and rub her back for the rest of the indoctrination

period. It made her feel rather silly and melodramatic to think of Mrs. Endicott's sons and to put herself in their place, as if she were thousands of miles away and something had happened to her mother. But then, all her friends had told her as long as she could remember that she had a disturbing mother complex, and that if anyone looked as if she could have a child over three, she turned into a mass of jelly and behaved with ridiculous sentimentality. That, of course, wasn't true. But she was susceptible to mothers.

Mrs. Endicott recovered. And Becky's mental peregrinations came back to the all-important subject of the moment. With a rather dramatic flourish, Miss Lawrence came out of her office with a sheaf of papers in her hands. The seamen scattered respectfully, but they hung around like well-trained puppies who have learned not to attack their feed pans until they hear the command of their master. Miss Lawrence posted the last page, turned with a smile to her avid audience, and, after a moment's hesitation, motioned to Becky, who followed her into her office and took the chair Miss Lawrence indicated. Becky had never been in the sanctum before. Many times she had hovered over Miss Lawrence at her desk in the open, beside the Officer of the Day, hoping her Commanding Officer would look up before she forgot what she had come to ask. Now that she had been invited into the inner office, she gazed with curiosity around her. On the

desk were many gadgets neatly arranged; on the book-cases were the pictures of an attractive elderly lady, who bore enough family resemblance to Miss Lawrence to be her mother, and a young, scowling boy, holding a baseball bat and obviously looking upon the camera as an instrument of the devil designed to interrupt a game he was winning.

Miss Lawrence seated herself at her desk, fiddled with her calendar and finally addressed Becky without actually meeting her eye. "McLeod, you are going on to advanced indoctrination," she said. "What would you like to do after you're commissioned?"

"I hoped to get into Personnel," Becky told her.

"Where?"

"In Washington, I suppose. That seems to be the center of things."

Miss Lawrence looked at Becky as if at someone in the first stages of insanity. "You would really like to go to Washington?"

"Well, I think so," Becky compromised.

Miss Lawrence gave her a penetrating glance. "I thought you might be glad to know that you are going to Capen."

Becky smiled wanly. She felt as if she were being offered a choice between Castor Oil and Seidlitz Powders. "I'm very glad. I was hoping I wouldn't leave Northampton."

"You don't seem terribly pleased, though."

Becky had tried to sound matter-of-fact. She was sure it would embarrass Miss Lawrence if she should give in and tell her exactly what Northrop House and the first weeks of indoctrination had meant to her. Perhaps her Company Commander was observant enough to know.

Miss Lawrence looked out of the window onto the courtyard where they had mustered every day in "clement and inclement" weather. "You know," she said quietly, "you will look back upon these days as the happiest ones of your Navy career. I didn't discover it until it was over for several months."

"I've realized that for a long time, Miss Lawrence. I don't expect anything to be quite like this."

Miss Lawrence nodded, a little nostalgically, Becky thought. "It wouldn't be right if it were. From now on you will be getting ready for the real job, all of you will. I don't know whether or not you'll get Personnel, but whatever you get, there'll be times when you'll wonder if you can take it. That isn't any reflection on your motive in joining the Navy. You wouldn't be human if you didn't tie yourself into a bow knot now and then and feel you'd throw in all your chips for a morning in bed."

"I'll remember that, Miss Lawrence. I'm especially glad you told me. You've never looked as if you'd like to toss in the chips."

"Perhaps not, but I've felt like it." She studied the

tips of her fingers as if there were something peculiarly fascinating about them. "There's one other thing I'd like to tell you. I think you've done a good job here. You've adapted yourself well. Keep it up."

She hopped up from her chair as if she'd been suddenly attacked by a hive of hornets. Becky accepted it as a royal dismissal.

Ann was in a state of wild-eyed, uncontrolled horror. She was like a retriever on a scent, darting here and there, if she could ever be said to dart, obviously hunting for something or somebody.

"What are you looking for?" Becky demanded.

Ann whirled around. "You! I've been looking all over for you. Do you know what's happened to me? Do you know what they've done?"

"No. But it couldn't be as bad as that."

"Oh, couldn't it! Well, I'm in Communications. Me, in Communications, and do you know what that means?" She didn't give Becky a chance to reply. "I'll be here two more months, and I have to live at the Hotel and I have dozens of roommates. And Perkins—Perkins got Advanced Indoctrination. She's going to Capen with you."

"Are you quite sure you didn't read it wrong?"

"Look yourself!" She pulled Becky toward the bulletin board and pointed to the communications list as if she were drawing attention to a particularly repulsive species in the reptile house. "And look—look at all the

people in my room. Seven of them—seven! I'd just as soon live in the Grand Central Station."

Becky had her first doubt of the infallibility of the selection office.

She couldn't see Ann, who had a disturbing habit of misplacing things, having valuable material in her custody, and with her tendency toward vagueness, she might be a positive menace before the war was over.

On the other hand, Ann had too many possibilities merely to be relegated to a burn basket for the duration. Well, Becky was sure the Navy knew what it was doing, but she wasn't at all sure Ann would know, in the next two months, what she was doing.

Miss Lawrence gave the class a farewell party that they knew would cause them many a nostalgic twinge in the days to come. It wasn't as much the fact that she had provided baskets of apples, tall cans of buttered pop-corn and Coca Cola for them, before the roaring fire, as it was that she joined them in a completely informal manner—almost as one of them. She sat on the sofa, surrounded by seamen, and answered a hundred and one questions about her own days of training when the school had just began.

Ann almost choked on her apple, when Miss Lawrence told the story of Lieutenant Reed, whose name to them connoted Miss McAfee's staff, hugging a platoon to the Hotel in a downpour before uniforms were issued, with a cellophane lingerie case on her head.

Miss Lawrence told them, too, of her first days on the staff—of the time when she and the Battalion Commander came out from lunch mess to find themselves confronted by a sudden summer storm. Reluctant to ruin their expensive hats, they had put them under their coats and run toward their quarters down the street. Dignity was of small concern until they ran, heads down, into the front ranks of an oncoming platoon.

"The platoon halted, the platoon leader saluted, we jammed our hats on our heads and returned the salute. Then, of course, we walked sedately home because we knew someone would look around to watch the Company Commander and Battalion Commander leaping the puddles to shelter."

Becky looked at Ann, who made her gesture of approval with rounded thumb and forefinger. Even Goss, who claimed to find Miss Lawrence a trifle formidable, seized a handful of pop-corn and moved closer to the sofa.

Miss Lawrence's hair, curled back from her face in a becoming and fashionable manner, gave a softer quality to her expression than the officer's hat that had always seemed to be a part of her. Becky had often wondered if Miss Lawrence realized that her hat was on her head or if she considered it military etiquette to wear it until she retired to the privacy of her quarters. In any case, she wore it more constantly than any officer on the station.

"She's like mother," Becky thought, remembering Mrs. McLeod coming in from the garden and reading her paper before the fire, from first page to last, before she was aware that she still wore her battered old Dobbs. "But tonight, she is another person. I think I know what she is like in civilian life—seventy-five per cent dignity, twenty-five per cent sheer fun—and the twenty-five per cent would be worth waiting for. It would probably catch you unawares."

Goss played for them. Until taps Miss Lawrence sang all their favorite Wave songs with them. They munched apples and chewed pop-corn between songs, and Perkins was delegated to keep Goss stimulated with Coca-Cola.

Then they stood and sang *Waves of the Navy*.

Becky thought she would never forget Goss, standing up as she played; and Miss Lawrence, whose eyes told them what she would never say; and all the seamen, crowding the room and the stairway, their song filling the air softly, as a farewell should.

"Well, good-night." Miss Lawrence spoke almost in a whisper.

"Good-night!" they echoed. "And thank you!" They parted to make way for her and stood strangely silent as she went to her room.

Ann's belongings were spread from one end of the room to the other and every available inch of floor space was covered by her assortment of luggage. Large pieces and small pieces stood open and half-packed. Becky retreated to a corner and wedged herself in between a pullman case and overnight bag, surveying the scene incredulously. "Do you seriously expect to have all this stuff packed in an hour?"

Ann tugged at the shoulder strap of her slip. "I've done it before."

"Of course you realize you'll never be able to wear another stitch of those clothes again."

Ann looked belligerent. "I don't see why?"

"You can't just hold clothes up and drop them into a suitcase. Look what you've done to your jacket. One of the sleeves is inside out, and I think you've packed your galoshes in the breast pockets. There's a queer bulge. Also," she pointed to Ann's hat box, "had you forgotten you packed your hat? You've just put your binder on top of it."

Ann's binder was like one of those suitcases that the makers claim can be tossed without damage from a train at full speed. She yanked it out and studied the remains of her Midshipmen's hat. Only the insignia was recognizable. "Oh well," she said dejectedly, "I'll never be sworn in, anyhow. I'll be beating a typewriter when you're a full Admiral."

Although Becky and Ann had sent all their civilian clothes home, and had fully expected to have at least one empty suitcase apiece, when the time came to carry their luggage downstairs they swayed and stumbled under the same ponderous weight and made the same number of back-breaking trips as on the day of their entry.

Ann's luggage, fortunately, was borne off in a bus to the Hotel but Becky discovered, to her dismay, that she was expected to carry hers from Northrop to Capen House. When she had thought of Capen as being "just down the street" she had never anticipated understudying a pack horse. Nor had she calculated the extra steps involved in getting up the circular driveway to the entrance. Furthermore, Capen House wasn't just down the street, but a good half-block down. When she had deposited her last piece of luggage in the hall, she left the formidable pile and collapsed into a chair in the living room. Her arms felt as if someone had pulled the tendons out through her finger tips and knotted them at the ends.

Somewhere behind Becky a door opened, there was a sound as of two blunt objects meeting head on, a muffled cry, and a heavy thud. There followed quickly an exclamation that was startlingly like one of Ann's graphic and uninhibited remarks.

Becky rushed apprehensively into the hall and nearly

stepped upon the body of an Ensign, sprawled full-length upon the floor amidst a tangle of luggage that Becky realized with horror belonged to her. Her first instinct was to back away, somehow to get out of Capen House before the recumbent officer recognized her; to catch the first train out of Northampton and abandon all hope of ever becoming a Naval officer. But before she could bring herself out of the fit of paralysis that had seized her, the Ensign looked up, gave her a frantic glance, and extended her hand for assistance. Becky pulled her up off the floor and watched her silently while she jammed her hat back on her head.

"Who left those suitcases there?" the Ensign demanded.

Becky was torn between confessing and disclaiming them. The only danger in disclaiming them lay in the fact that she could no more get them to her room unnoticed than she could sneak a Percheron colt up the back stairs.

"I'm afraid they're mine, Ensign. I didn't realize I had put them in front of a door."

The Ensign appraised her suspiciously. "You'd better take a good look at that door. I come out of it quite often. I live in there."

"I'm terribly sorry. I hope you didn't hurt yourself."

The Ensign smiled half-heartedly. "I don't see any broken bones piercing the skin."

Becky felt a spasm of relief. The officer seemed to be a good sport, in spite of a long and rather forbidding face. "It might have been just my luck to have picked the Company Commander's door," she said buoyantly. "I'm sure she wouldn't have been as tolerant as you are."

The Ensign brushed off her skirt and cut a sharp eye at Becky. "That's just what you did."

Becky looked at her with horrified fascination. "You're Miss Connelly!"

"I am." Miss Connelly tugged at her hat, straightened her tie and swept out the front door, leaving Becky to face in her imagination a very grim future. There was no doubt that Miss Connelly was going a little short on the starboard leg. It was not the sort of impression Becky had hoped to make on her first day in Capen House.

She climbed the stairs to her quarters reluctantly. It was strange that she didn't have the curiosity about them that she had had about N45. She knew that she had four roommates. That, in itself, took away any possibility of joyful anticipation. She was willing to accept Miss Lawrence's statement that she had already had the pleasantest days of her Navy career. At the head of the stairs she paused. Which way to turn? Which way was 13? And then she saw it. The door was open. She went unenthusiastically toward it. Would she be lucky enough to find none of her roommates

there, so that she could sit down, quietly, and try to get used to the idea of living in a strange place with strange people? Ann had been a stranger once, hard as it was to remember now. But how many people had Ann's priceless quality of tacit understanding?

Becky peered tentatively inside the door, and seeing no one, burst into the room gratefully. But she had been mistaken. The room was not unoccupied. At the desk, laboriously applying polish to her fingernails, sat what she supposed was one of the seamen she was expected to live with for three weeks. Her hair was wound tightly onto curlers, and out of her thin face peered small, dark brown eyes. The eyes widened at sight of her, and a nasal voice invited, "Come in."

"I was about to," Becky said.

"You're Becky McLeod."

Becky nodded.

"I've been waiting for you all day. My name's Rosena Hoffman. No one else is here."

Becky looked at her with a mixture of incredulity and curiosity and thought, "The things you see when you haven't got a gun!" Either this one of her room-mates was some manner of mental wizard or a procurement office somewhere had let her slip through during a blackout.

"You were in England, weren't you?"

Becky nodded. "Yes."

"How long were you there?"

"Three years."

"Gee! What were you there so long for?"

Becky cast her eye about for a blunt instrument.

"That's hard to say, I suppose because I wanted to be there."

"What did you feel like when the war started? Were you scared?"

"It wasn't the most soothing thing that ever happened to me." She backed toward the door. "I think I'll get my luggage."

Hoffman sprang up. Her terrier-like face was eager and friendly. "Can I help you?"

"Oh no, no, thanks." Becky almost stumbled over the door sill in her haste to get out of the room. Once free of her tantalizing inquisitor, she sped down the passageway and the stairs to her luggage. Perhaps if she sat in the living room for a while and smoked a cigarette quietly she would get her second wind. The 14th of February to the 9th of March! Three mortal weeks of Rosena Hoffman—her thin, intense face and irrepressible questions. Someone had said that she'd like two of her roommates, avoiding mention of the third. She had never pursued the subject, imagining that the third would be someone like Perkins. That she could have borne. Out of three roommates anyone was lucky not to draw one "goon girl." Now she realized the significance of the furtive glances that had

passed among certain seamen crowding the bulletin board when the list was posted.

"Does anyone know Hoffman?" she had asked.

"No, that is not very well. I know one of her room-mates," someone answered.

"What's she like?"

"I guess she's all right."

That was all she could pry out of anyone. The reason was now obvious. She blew a cloud of smoke against the window pane. It looked as if the incredibly good days were really over. But it was stupid to hope they would go on. There was a sense of finality about the division between advanced indoctrination and Communications, about moving from Northrop, about starting on the "last lap" among strange faces. This was the first break. Next would come graduation and the real job, who knew where? Then everything would be strange and the familiarity of Northampton would seem like a dream. It was best to make the change gradually, like this. Easier to adapt oneself later to the big strangenesses, after a good dose of nostalgia while she could still see Ann and talk to her.

She wondered if Ann felt as lost as she did. She'd find out. As soon as she had unpacked, she'd walk down to the Hotel and they could "hash it over" for awhile. That would bring her back a little closer to the things she wanted to remember.

Hoffman's small black eyes rested on Becky dis-

approvingly and with a certain amount of fascination as she deposited her luggage, piece after piece, in what she hoped was her quarter of the room.

"Is that all yours?"

Becky looked up sharply. "Yes." Her tone implied that she was prepared to fight it out.

"Where are you going to put it? I mean all the clothes in those suitcases."

"The same place I put them at Northrop. Why?"

"That's your dresser over there. You only have two drawers in it."

"That's all I had at Northrop. Where are yours?"

"Over here."

"Then relax."

Becky looked at the bunks and wished there were more than a window's distance between them. It would be altogether too easy to give way to the temptation to reach over with a havelock some dark night and strangle Hoffman.

"Which is your bunk?"

Hoffman pointed. "There. I don't like draughts, and I don't like sleeping in the lower bunk."

"We'll get along beautifully," Becky said. "I like draughts and I love the lower, so I'll bed down over here."

When she had unpacked, she piled her empty luggage in a corner, stood up and stretched.

"Now, I'm leaving this all here. If it gets in your way, just kick it around until it gets lost."

Hoffman's jaw sagged. "Where are you going?"

Becky gave her a quick saccharine smile. "I'm going over to the Administrative Building to resign."

Ann was sitting on the floor in front of a battered bureau. The bottom drawer was opened into her lap. At her side, heaped in a precarious pile, were the bulkiest of her familiar belongings. It was evident from one glance at her harried expression that she was finding it impossible to cram into one drawer what two had barely been able to accommodate. Becky watched her from the doorway for several moments.

"What are you going to do with the residue, pet?"

Ann looked up and leaned back on her hands. Her frown gave way to a slow smile. "Well, I'll be darned. You couldn't stay away from me, could you?"

Becky shook her head. "I have at last seen the evil that you are the lesser of."

"Meaning roommate?"

"Honey, it's no room. It's a cage. I found a long-billed magpie perched on the desk. Have you met all seven of yours yet?"

"Only four. One with terrific tact informed me that they were hoping the billet list was incorrect. You can imagine how long it took me to ditto it."

"You haven't seen anything," Becky told her, and pulling off her gloves, collapsed on the nearest bed.

Ann sprang at her with consternation all over her face. "Don't! Please don't sit on that bed! Sit on mine, sit on the floor. The owner of that bed is psychotic on the subject of a sat-upon bed."

Becky sprang up as from contact with a tack. "All right. But which is your bed. I am exhausted."

Ann put her hands on her hips and wagged her head. "Now which do you think would be my bed when I got here last?"

"I can't climb that far and I have a phobia about walls."

"You hit the nail on the head. But there is one very charming member of this menagerie. When she heard the ultimatum about sitting on beds, she told me that I could sit on hers as long as she could perch on mine. She has a delusion that she is one of our feathered friends."

"Cultivate her, Ann. Cultivate her. I had no such reception. I was reminded that I was one of four, and what I could cram into my very own two drawers and my fourth of a closet, I more than deserved. Otherwise I was as welcome as measles in a boot camp."

Ann drew herself up. "You've given me the soap box more than once. Now I shall have the exquisite pleasure of handing it back to you. Do you remember those nights at Beckman's when I was in such despair, and you used to tell me that I may have thought life was

worth living before I joined the Navy, but I ought to have sense enough to realize that it really wasn't?"

"I remember it distinctly," Becky said. "I also remember that I was right."

"But you just gave a definite impression."

"Don't check up on me, Ann. You know I've never liked it. In spite of Hoffman, two drawers and a fourth of a closet, it is worth it."

"I'm glad you think so," Ann said succinctly.

"Don't you?"

"I don't like to disappoint you. But I tackle a typewriter tomorrow for the first time. I'm as frightened of it as it is of me."

Becky laughed. "You mustn't let it know you're frightened. It's like riding a horse. The moment it knows you're scared, you're bound to part company."

Ann grunted. "How do you expect to fool a typewriter?"

"There were a lot of horses I thought I couldn't fool," Becky told her, "but I did by staying the course longer than they did."

Ann went back to her unpacking, alternately cramming her belongings into the one drawer allotted to her and scratching her head in perplexity. "It can't be done," she mumbled. "I'll have to sleep in what's left."

"I once heard of a seaman sleeping in full uniform," Becky said. "But it wasn't for any such reason as this."

"I know. Don't tell me. She couldn't get in the win-

dow faster than the mate of the deck could get down the hall."

Becky waved her hand around the room. "This is the sort of thing I expected when I came up here. Four little bunks in a row. Lots of little roommates in the bunks."

"It's taking a bath in an assembly line that's going to change my way of living," Ann said. "It embarrasses me to think of it. Let's get out of here."

"Beckman's?"

"Where else?"

Ann attacked the first of her two club sandwiches without her usual enthusiasm.

"What's the matter? Feeling sick?" Becky could see evidence of conflict in Ann's loss of appetite.

"I don't think I can take it, bub."

"Do you mean what I think you do?"

"I can't take eight weeks of Communications and that room set-up. One or the other I might be able to handle. If we still lived in Northrop and you could anoint me with fragrant oils and fan me with palm leaves between Communications classes, I might last that course. But, ye gods, to trot back to the stall every night and toss a coin to see who studies at the desk and who studies on the floor and whether we have air in the room or slowly suffocate so Susie Snooks won't catch cold!"

"You've forgotten just one little thing," Becky told her. "I don't think my new set-up is so hot either, but we both got more than we expected the first round. Two to a room and we both happened to hit it off. Indocrination, and it was interesting and not too stiff. Lawrence kept us on the griddle just enough to make life exciting. But we didn't come into it to be entertained. We came for just exactly what we're going to get now."

Ann smiled. "You and your soap box."

"I'm not preaching. I'm telling you something you've forgotten."

"O. K. I'll stop grouching."

"It isn't the grouching that matters, Ann. It's what goes on in your own head. You'll have to take that around with you for the duration."

"But they've got me in the wrong school, bub. Look at me—just look at me! Do you see anything that makes you think I was cut out to be a communicator?"

"I don't know. What's a communicator supposed to look like?"

"A cross between Marconi and Mata Hari."

"I see a faint resemblance to Mata Hari." Becky frowned and stirred her coffee absently. "Seriously, you'll probably get a job in Communications that will make you feel a whole lot closer to the war than Procurement would. I don't know what they do in those offices, but you're bound to know a lot more about

what's really going on than we ever will. That kind of thing would almost make me feel someone had put a gun in my hand."

Ann looked up quickly, as she did when a new idea began to germinate. "I hadn't figured it out that way. All I could think of was learning to type forty words a minute and sitting at a switchboard for the duration."

"Someone has to do that, too," Becky reminded her.

"I know, but they'll probably save it for someone who can really beat it out."

Becky relaxed. Given time, she could usually maneuver Ann into arguing herself out of her own misgivings. This was obviously one of those occasions, for Ann was approaching the second club sandwich with the reservation of a cannibal.

Becky went back to Capen at the last possible moment. It would be easier to take the new roommates in a small dose the first time, to creep up on them gradually before they saw her. One of the three was going to be her bunkmate and was going to share with her the chest of drawers by the window, and she was determined that it would be the one least likely to walk in her sleep and to mind if she overflowed into the third drawer. Faces were often deceptive, but she could already eliminate one, and unless the odds were against her, there must be one whose understanding glance would solve the puzzle.

Becky met the glance sooner than she expected. Sitting on the bunk she had claimed and obviously out of sympathy with the general atmosphere of the quarters, was a seaman she vaguely recognized. The seaman looked at her, as she came into the room, much as she imagined a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp would look at an Allied army of occupation. "This is no time to hesitate," she told herself sharply and descended upon the distraught seaman. "Hello! I didn't know you were coming in here. This is grand."

The seaman's face lit up hopefully, although her eyes held a puzzled expression Becky knew was due to the fact that they had never met. "I'm certainly glad to see *you*," she echoed.

"Which bunk do you want, upper or lower?" Becky decided in one swift glance at the fourth occupant of their quarters that she was shy, probably dull and incommunicative. While that was a welcome contrast to Hoffman, it would hardly make for a congenial bunk-mate.

"I thought you said you *had* to sleep in the lower!" Hoffman's reminder had a belligerent ring.

"That's all right. I really prefer the upper." The seaman got up from the bunk in a gesture of finality. "Is that our dresser there?"

"Yes—take the drawers you want. Now, how about a coke?"

"You haven't met Frances Duffin—" Hoffman per-

formed the introduction ceremonies like a *chatelaine*.

"Duffy—" the fourth member protested quietly, "is my name."

"This is Becky McLeod—she's just come back from England."

"Not quite, Hoffman—take it easy," Becky said, but Hoffman ignored the correction. She was going to do this her way.

"And you know Virginia Farley, Duffin——"

"Duffy," the owner of the name repeated. She was beginning to redden.

Hoffman, having concluded introductions, then turned a rather suspicious eye on Becky and Virginia Farley. "You two seem to know each other."

"Uh-huh," Becky replied. "Come on, Virginia."

Hoffman's voice pursued them out the door. "Aren't you going to unpack? It's Captain's Inspection tomorrow."

"Patience!" Becky sighed. "Of course you don't know me from a hole in the ground. I was at Northrop."

"I knew you. You were platoon leader." Virginia laughed. "It just startled me a bit to have you greet me like an old friend. I hope it didn't take me too long to catch on."

"I didn't give you much chance to hesitate."

"You realize, I suppose, that we have drawn *the* lemon of the Station."

"It's pretty obvious. Do you think that it's disciplinary action against us?"

"I can't think of anything I've done that's bad enough to deserve it."

"Little Duffy seems nice enough."

"She is. She was in Gillett with me. Hoffman's completely thrown her. She's not the mouse she seems. Wait till she thaws. She was mustering petty officer while I was Company Commander."

"That's why I recognized you," Becky said.

Virginia nodded. "We used to salute and mumble good-morning. Do you know there are three Company Commanders under this one roof? I doubt if it's big enough to hold us all. Booker was Company Commander here, Buchanan at Northrop, and I at Gillett. Someone's going to get hurt feelings if Miss Connelly switches from Maxwell to one of them. As long as it stays neutral it's all right; otherwise it'll be a rat race."

"I'll vote for you," Becky told her, "on the voice alone."

* * * * *

Although Northrop had been threatened with Captain's Inspection regularly every Saturday, it had never materialized during basic instruction. However, what Northrop had missed, Capen and Hoffman knew well.

"No matter where you dust," Hoffman said with the

confidence of a sage, "the Captain will rub his white glove across the place you forgot. Last time we had inspection he put his hand underneath the mattress on the top bunk to see if the springs were dusted. You should have seen his glove!" She leaned back in her chair and looked at the overhead light suspended by a chain from the ceiling. "That needs dusting."

"We'd better start cleaning. Tonight's our last chance," Virginia said.

"It shouldn't take four of us long," Becky added pointedly, for Hoffman showed every indication of electing herself to direct operations from the desk.

"I'm going to take a bath first," Hoffman announced.

A dead and frightening silence fell upon the room, but Hoffman seemed not to notice. Arrayed in a red woolen dressing gown and a bathing cap that gave her swarthy face an eagle-like expression, she gathered up towel, soap and wash cloth and left the room, pausing in the doorway only long enough to smile and offer, "I have some furniture polish in the wardrobe. You can use it if you want."

Becky believed she had now come as near as she ever would to apoplexy, which didn't run in her family. All the blood in her veins seemed to have rushed to her head, where a dangerous pounding was taking place. "That," she said, "is the pay off."

Virginia shrugged her shoulders. "We might as well get going. Someone has to do it."

"I'll get the mops." Duffy scuttled out of the room as if escaping an electrical storm.

They had polished the floor, the furniture and were washing the woodwork when Hoffman reappeared. "Nothing like a hot bath to rest you," she said happily.

"So I hear tell," Duffy replied.

Becky smiled for the first time that evening. She could understand now what Virginia meant about Duffy. Duffy would do in a crisis.

"You didn't forget the back of the wardrobe, did you?" Hoffman inquired.

Virginia turned around slowly from the window-sill. "By golly, I believe I did!" With a flick of the wrist, she tossed the dust cloth into Hoffman's unwilling hands. "And, you know, I don't think I dusted that top light."

"How about a coke?" Becky asked.

"Fine thing. Come on, Duffy," Virginia said.

* * * * *

Not even during quiet hours had Becky heard a house as silent as Capen was when the inspecting party came aboard. Three blasts of the whistle galvanized the seamen at attention beside their bunks. From a distance came the sound of voices and footsteps gradually ascending the ladder. They faded into silence when the party entered the first quarters.

Becky and Virginia stood facing Hoffman and Duffy.

They stared, unseeing, at each other's heads for thirty minutes before they heard the voices of the inspecting party again, and the sound of their footsteps, approaching now instead of withdrawing. A small pulse started to beat in Becky's throat. Duffy gave her a sickly smile and pointed at the floor between them.

They all looked down at the same time. A ball of dust the size of a marble was skitting along the floor. Virginia's foot shot out to pin it to the floor and missed; Becky missed, too, but Hoffman, unwilling to take a chance, swept down on the "kitten," snapped it up and sprang back to attention.

"Is this one next?" the Captain asked.

"What'll I do with it!" Hoffman whispered.

"Eat it!" Becky said, and to her amazement, Hoffman did.

If the Captain noticed the mixed expressions of delight and revulsion on the faces of the seamen in 13, he gave no indication of it beyond a slight lifting of his brows.

"Good-morning," he said.

"Good-morning, Captain," they replied in a chorus, visibly pulling themselves together.

What the Captain may have missed, Miss McDermott and Lieutenant Flint did not. They kept a sharp and quizzical eye roving from one to the other of the roommates, while the Captain went about his search for dust and dirt. His white gloved hand, in the space

of ten minutes, seemed to cover every surface in the room—the mirrors, the shades, the top of the door, the inner, hidden surface of the bunk springs. The four occupants stole fleeting glances at his glove whenever he came into their view.

"Well, Miss McDermott, it looks as if these girls know how to dust," he remarked jovially, turning up the palm of his glove. For a moment he looked around the room thoughtfully. "I wonder if they remembered the lamp," he said at last.

Becky felt Virginia stiffen at her side. Duffy surreptitiously shook her head. The Captain reached to the back of the long neon tube and ran his fingers the length of it. As he went from the room he examined his glove.

It was another thirty minutes before a single blast of the whistle released them from the strain of speechless attention.

"Did you dust it!" Becky, Virginia and Duffy shot the question in unison at Hoffman.

"I always do." She grinned. "That's usually the first place he looks."

"Why the devil didn't you let on!" Virginia cried.

"We're not supposed to talk during Captain's Inspection."

"Irritating woman!" Becky muttered.

"Did you say something?" Hoffman asked.

"Want a coke?" Becky replied.

8

FAUNCE AUDITORIUM was heavy with an atmosphere of expectancy. Five hundred apprentice seamen sat shoulder to shoulder, in a more sober mood than they had felt since they passed the portals of their Procurement Offices. This was the first big move forward—from this day, in a very few moments, they would rank as midshipmen, with full right to the gold, fouled anchor. They had already signed the oath of acceptance, putting their names to the document almost reverently.

Becky sat beside an "M" she didn't know. Her roommates were scattered among the "D's," "H's," and "F's," but this was one time that no seaman could really be a stranger to her. She looked about her and thought, "They must all feel as I do—it's in their faces, in the way they sit, so straight and tense." They couldn't bilge out now—at least the chances were infinitesimal.

They had made the first grade, and the next would bring them the coveted eagle insignia and the blue stripe.

Lieutenant Miller stood before them, ready to administer the oath.

"Will you rise and raise your right hands."

Becky felt an almost sickening surge of excitement.

"Repeat after me——

"I, Becky McLeod, having been appointed a midshipman, Volunteer Reserve, U. S. Naval Reserve, do hereby accept such appointment, and do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter: so help me God."

At the conclusion of the oath, Lieutenant Miller paused. Then his eyes swept the sea of faces with a welcoming smile. "Congratulations, Midshipmen."

Becky felt that he must have remembered at that moment the words with which the Navy had bound him to serve it faithfully. There was an acceptance of camaraderie in his gesture, as if he were recapturing,

through them, a thrilling day and sharing with them a jealously guarded honor.

The Midshipmen took a single word and repeated it to themselves—unspoken and profound. It implied so much, now; it had acquired today such lasting significance.

"Congratulations."

"Miss McLeod," Miss Connelly said at evening muster, "take the Company to mess."

Becky stepped out of rank with such a sinking of the heart as she hadn't experienced since Miss Lawrence appointed her platoon leader. It was a shock in itself to be called "Miss" again, after all these weeks. In addition, with three Company Commanders to choose from, she had to be the one to go through the pangs of nervous indigestion again, without Ann to give her periodic encouragement and solemnly guide the leading platoon in the right direction, regardless of commands. There was another more disturbing feature of this appointment. How would Virginia take it?

She stepped before the Company, replacing Hooker. Hooker smiled at her quizzically and fell into ranks.

"She knows what kind of a performance this is going to be," Becky thought. "Well, anyhow, I'm one up this time. I know the commands." She looked along the ranks. "But I'll never be able to see the front from the back in time to get them around a corner, and a plugged

nickel to a doughnut, every darned corner will catch me with the third platoon."

"Company!" Her voice seemed, to her own critical ears, to fade away. She'd have to yell like a drill sergeant and then, of course, her mother would have to despair completely of her ever recapturing the soft Kentucky inflection. She could hear her mother now, "Becky, for goodness sake, do you *have* to scream? I know those nice young girls can hear you, if you'll just lower your voice a little. And," she would add, "please don't stand so ungracefully, dear. You look just like a ramrod."

"Platoon——"

"Platoon——"

"Platoon——"

"Attention!" The gusto of her command shook her nerve for a moment. It was coming too easily—somewhere, in her background, there must be bull-whacker blood!

When she had set the Company in motion, she felt a bit like the caboose on a trans-continental freight train. The driveway wasn't wide enough to accommodate a column of four and a Company Commander, so she was automatically forced up onto the snow-covered irregular slope, beside it, where she tried all the maneuvers of a mountain goat to escape the pitfalls neatly obscured by the snow.

Somehow, in her concern over her footing, she lost

sight of the leading platoon which, when she looked up, was about to enter the hallway of the building across the street.

"Halt!" she yelled.

The tenuous column obeyed abruptly.

"What the devil do I do now?" She climbed down to the driveway. From somewhere came a raucous laugh. Her head turned sharply. Well, there was one advantage in being Company Commander. She'd find out who did that and recommend an aptitude. You didn't whinny in ranks like a frightened horse, even if your Company Commander marched you, rank by rank, down a manhole. But the sound had not come from the ranks. It was rising again, battering the winter air. When she finally followed the sound to its source, she saw that it came from Miss Connelly, who was standing on the porch, overlooking the driveway. Hands pressed to her sides and head thrown back, she made no slightest effort to conceal her amusement.

Becky stared at her for a moment in frank surprise and mounting embarrassment. Then, involuntarily, she laughed, too, and heard the troops begin an echoing snicker behind her.

"About face!" she commanded.

The long column whipped around. She brought them back across the street, faced them about again, and set them off, with a "column left," toward Sunshine Mountain. She watched Hooker go by. Except for a slightly

strained expression around the mouth, she looked as unconcerned as an owl.

"Nice of her not to look 'I told you so,'" Becky thought. "In fact, there are quite a lot of nice people up here."

"Virginia, I feel awful about this company commander business. I want you to know it." Becky tilted back in her chair, gripping the desk to prevent a casualty.

Virginia, sitting opposite her, shrugged her shoulders and pushed the desk lamp aside. She folded her arms across her book and looked squarely at Becky. "Let's get this straight right now. There aren't any hard feelings about it at all. It's probably solved the problem in the best way."

"But that kind of thing is much more in your line than mine. I might add, it isn't in my line at all—witness my opening performance."

"I humped them into a telephone pole once, with my eyes wide open, just as Pierce and his wife came out of their house," Virginia told her.

Becky laughed. "I must admit that puts me a little bit more at my ease."

The mate of the deck came in with the mail. "You hit the jack-pot, McLeod." She handed Becky several letters.

"What about me?" Virginia asked.

The mate made an O with thumb and forefinger and waved it in Virginia's face.

"Just because I don't write to anyone isn't any reason they can't write to me!" she complained. "Here I am, working like a dog all day, hardly time to brush my teeth, and my friends are such ungrateful——"

"Shh! You mustn't use words like that in the Navy——" the mate wagged a finger at her.

"If I want to be a sailor first and a lady afterwards that's my business."

"I'll see you get a letter tomorrow, if I have to write it myself," the mate promised and left the room.

Virginia groaned disconsolately. "Don't let me stop you from reading yours."

Becky ripped open an envelope with the feeling of eating a steak in front of a starving man. "Doesn't look very interesting," she commented. "Don't know who this is from and here's another strange breed of handwriting——oh——"

"Oh what?"

"Oh, how glad I am that Hoffman isn't here."

The first letter Becky read puzzled her. An invitation from Alexandra Mecklin in her bold, sprawling hand was the last surprise she anticipated anywhere. She and Alex had practically nothing in common from the way they looked to the way they thought. Alex was a true cosmopolite and one of the few intellectuals Becky knew. Her variegated and always startling ap-

proaches to the problems of life were a little frightening to one whose approaches were usually of a pattern and always direct. Combining this with an overbearing personality and even more overpowering figure, she represented, to Becky, a fascinating but heady side of life. Too much of Alex Mecklin was like too much Lobster Newburg.

It was two years since they had met in the house of a London friend. At that time, Alex was contemplating a tour of all the spots where the war was hottest. With connections in every field anyone could poke his finger at, it was not unlikely she could become a foreign correspondent with as much ease as she had wangled her way into the House of Commons to hear Churchill speak when Royalty itself was almost forced to hold one another on each other's laps.

But Alex, inexplicably, had returned to the United States and confined her boundless energy and ingenuity to writing a series of articles for a newspaper syndicate, blasting the Administration and its prosecution of the war. Becky had never read the articles, but she had heard that they were much too intellectual for the purpose. In fact, that they were too intellectual—period. That was in the days when things were going the Axis way and it was quite easy to be a swivel-chair strategist. She couldn't help but wonder what Alex would have to say about the prosecution of the war, now that the tide had turned. She read the letter again:

"My dear Becky:

This matter has been imminent ever since I read in our local paper that you had taken the veil. It will be short and to the point because you probably don't remember me or my name. Nor will you remember that I have a rather attractive farm not far from Northampton. As you march down Sunshine Mountain (I am a graduate of Smith) and look to the south, or east—I never was good with a compass—you will see before you the general neighborhood in which the farm is located. It is called, unhappily, 'Mountain View,' and almost any taxi driver in Northampton can take you to it, which I hope you will allow one to do this week-end. Bring a man, if you know one you can stand that long.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Mecklin"

It would certainly be an interesting change, Becky thought, if she could stand Alex that long. She opened the second letter. It, too, was brief and certainly to the point.

"Becky—

The same gent with the same car will meet you at the same place, same time Saturday.

Sam."

Looks like two and two make four, she told herself. They must have gotten together. "Here's someone," she told Virginia, "who wants me to come for the week-end and bring a man——"

"Vain hope," Virginia said.

"But oddly enough, the man has come in the same mail."

"Then I'd say you were crazy not to go. It would be a good change for you."

"It would be a revolution."

* * * * *

It was drill on Friday that decided Becky to accept Alex's invitation; that and the fact that she didn't care to repeat the last meeting with Sam. Friday was always like a page out of "My Day." From 6:20 in the morning until 5:00 in the afternoon they ate on the double, marched on the double, and breathed on the double, and, apparently on the assumption that the midshipmen could recover from exhaustion over the week-end, the Instruction Staff produced quizzes that added several branches to "the tree." Becky marched a weary Company to the Armory at four o'clock. Drill was already in progress. Company 3 from the Hotel, by platoons, was in the throes of circles left and right, escaping head-on collisions only by some miracle of last minute movement.

It was almost as cold in the Armory as it was outside. Becky's midshipmen looked contracted within their raincoats. When Pierce saw them, he halted Company 3. "Fall out and secure gear." He turned to Becky. "Remove your gear and fall in."

The assembly line, Becky thought. Wonder how many mistakes I'll make today. Maybe none, for a change. That would be nice. She had to confess to herself that her feeling about leading a company had not been, since that first day, very characteristic of her. She actually liked it, and the fact that Miss Connelly had chosen her had given her a growing and inordinate sense of pride. The three Company Commanders were platoon leaders. She didn't doubt for a moment that they would make far better Company Commanders than she, but it was a fairly absorbing challenge to try to prove otherwise. She had wondered, often, if Miss Connelly knew that she was slated for the role of Company Commander in her first billet, not distant now, and felt it her Navy duty to prepare her charge for the task. But she preferred to think that Miss Connelly knew she hated to admit defeat without a second shot at the target.

Pierce put them through the paces. For two hours they drilled. Simple column and flank movements were beyond them now. His voice hit the girders and struck back with irresistible force, and it seemed to Becky that his eyes never left her feet.

I wish I had his confidence, she thought, watching his feet keeping step with theirs, and his outspread fingers, more expressive of his concentration than his voice. At every command, his fingers doubled and extended themselves. There was confidence, too, in his bearing, the set of his head, that intrigued her. She must remember, if she ever shed the simple fouled anchor for the Navy eagle, to carry herself as Pierce did. Someone had an eye to the susceptibility of the weaker sex when they chose him. If Pierce had looked like a good many drill masters she had seen in her time, she doubted if the Midshipmen would have lasted the two hours that day.

She brought her company back fifteen minutes before mess muster. They crowded around the fireplace, grateful for a cigarette, a moment to gossip, drawn with the fatigue of the day.

Alex or no Alex, Becky thought, I need a day in the country.

* * * * *

Sam seemed less strained when he met her a second time. He knew where to look for her—beside the Coca-Cola machine. The Officer of the Day stared at him but he gave her scarcely a glance, and came directly to Becky, as if she were the only woman in the room.

"Hello, Sam," she said.

"It's good to see you."

"You won't think so, when I tell you what I've done to you."

His question was merely in his eyes.

"You are in for a week-end."

"Am I?"

"Yes. With a rather terrifying woman."

"Why?"

"I don't know, except that I felt an urgent need of the country."

"That doesn't sound so bad."

"But I doubt if it's our kind of country."

"You don't mean elegant country?"

"I don't know. Probably not. But our hostess hates horses, so I'm quite sure you can't ride; and she thinks dogs are charming in a kennel, so there won't be one to sit at your feet."

"Does she permit trees, or does she uproot them as they sprout?"

"Yes. She adores trees and delphinium. Of course, if you get the delphinium it will be a miracle of nature, but I am sure she has hundreds of evergreens."

"And she hasn't an aversion to guests who take walks?"

"Not as long as they don't insist upon her walking with them."

"Then we shall get along beautifully. When do we leave?"

"As soon as I've telephoned her. Wait here for me, will you?"

"Isn't it a little late to telephone?"

"In civilian life, you'd have your throat cut, but you never know whether you can or can't in the Navy. In some ways, that's the nicest thing about the Service."

He shrugged his shoulders and lit a cigarette.

"Your friends are very tolerant," he told her, swinging the car out of Northampton toward the distant silhouette of mountains.

"That's the only way I like them." She watched the road ahead thoughtfully, for a moment. "But she isn't an old friend. I'd better tell you now that she's one of those friends of a mutual friend——"

"Shall we go back?" Sam asked hopefully.

"Of course not. I'd prefer not to have her as an enemy."

"Out of sight, out of mind——"

"I have a feeling that doesn't hold with Alex."

"I think I know what you mean."

"She's intellectual and sophisticated. I expect I'm in for a hard week-end in some ways."

"Meaning——?"

"She will be the last person in the world to approve of women in the armed services, and she won't hesitate to express her opinion."

"That wouldn't smack of frustration, would it?"

Becky shook her head. "Sam, if Alex took a notion to join the Waves, she'd probably end by running everything. That's the sort of person she is. If she says black is white, you have to pinch yourself to keep from believing it."

He laughed. "I think I get the general idea. What does she look like?"

"Large and dark. Rather what the English call a 'fine figger of a woman.' Piercing brown eyes and an annihilating laugh. I've heard she's the perfect hostess, so far as the mechanics are concerned, and one of the few gourmets left in the world. She'd rather shoot herself than serve the wrong wine with the fish course—not because it shouldn't be done but because her palate apparently screams for mercy."

"I think I'm running out of gas," Sam said.

"You can always smell the gasoline first," Becky told him.

"Now why the hell do you know that!"

"Because a woman who doesn't know a motor like the palm of her hand is about as much use driving an ambulance in England as an armless man in a relay race."

"All right," Sam replied dismally. "But don't ever ask me to prove it again."

"Prove what?"

"That I love you better than my own sanity."

They drove up a long grade and went past the en-

trance to "Mountain View" twice before Becky saw the battered sign among some laurel bushes against a brick wall. Sam backed the car to the entrance. "Sure you don't want to change your mind?"

"Not at all sure. But it really *is* too late now."

* * * * *

They were shown into a long, high-ceiled, dimly-lit room. Lining the walls were row after row of calf and cloth-bound books, which gave the only color to a rather drab interior. The room was obviously the room of a man—a studious man.

"Is she married?" Sam asked.

"She was—her husband died about five years ago. They say his library is just as he always kept it. This must be it. It certainly doesn't look like her."

"Well! I gave you a half-hour to get lost."

They turned toward the figure sweeping down on them. Alex wore a tweed suit of a London variety, a primrose colored silk blouse, fastened at her throat with a diamond sail fish, and a pair of walking shoes that made Becky much less conscious of the alarming growth of her own feet. Alex was as large a woman as she remembered her to be but there was no doubt that the infallible English tailor had produced his masterpiece when he fitted the tweed suit.

Becky extended her hand and felt the firm clasp of

Alex's fingers. She liked a firm handclasp; it was so unpleasant to shake a jelly-fish.

"This is Lieutenant Wilding, Alex. We're neighbors in Goshen."

Alex directed a steady, appraising glance at Sam.

"It's very nice of you to come."

"It's nice of you to have me. The country's something of a luxury to us these days. We ought to have more of it." Becky liked Sam's instinctive habit of looking people squarely in the eye when he talked to them. He had a way of making them feel that what they were saying was the most important thing in the world at that moment. There wasn't a pair of eyes, steady, inquisitive or piercing, that could make Sam lower his first. Generations of Virginia self-confidence behind that, she thought.

Alex shifted her eyes and took a gold cigarette case from her jacket pocket. "Farmer," she said. "What in the devil would make anyone leave a farm?" Without waiting for a reply, she went on. "Come in the other room. It's dark in here and I can't stand artificial light in the daytime. Don't like it anyhow. I've heard more interesting comments about myself, sitting in the dark. It's always such fun when the lights go on." She led them to a glassed-in porch whose décor, Becky thought, was much more in keeping with her personality. The neutral tone of bamboo furniture was relieved by a soft shade of blue upholstery. Against the one long

wall stood a *hikiee*, at least seven feet long and wide enough, Becky felt sure, to sleep four people comfortably abreast. The draperies, drawn back now, and hanging to the floor matting, showed the unmistakable hand of an English fabric designer they both knew well. Sheaves of wheat, plows, scythes, and stylized horses in shaded tomato, beige and blue framed a view of snow-covered mountains. At one end of the porch a fireplace, alone, remained of the original enclosure, and the space it did not occupy was filled by three foot logs.

"I advise the *hikiee*," Alex said. "It was made purely for comfort." She pulled a bell-cord. "What would you like to drink—cocktail or highball?"

"I can't drink," Becky told her. "That is, unless you happen to have a Coca-Cola, which, I hear, is like asking for peacocks' tongues."

Alex made a face. "You can't mean it."

Becky nodded. "The Navy means it. Nothing alcoholic until I have a stripe. As a matter of fact, if they let us drink, most of us wouldn't. I don't think we could navigate, what with rising before dawn and pushing our brains and bodies around those fifteen hours and thirty minutes."

"I think Edna can find you a Coca-Cola." She turned to Sam. "You can't let me drink alone, Lieutenant, and I certainly am not going to have Coca-Cola. How about a Martini?"

"That's more in my line, too," Sam said. "But I think I see Becky's point."

Edna was middle-aged, Irish and apparently dumb. She came onto the porch, received her orders, nodded and withdrew. Alex saw curiosity in Becky's expression. "She's always been like that. Sometimes it sends me into fits of screaming meemies, but she's faithful, discreet and, of course, her breed is almost extinct now. I thought I'd get someone to help her but by the time the applicants got through interviewing me I was so depressed over my shortcomings I had to go to bed for two days." She gave Becky one of her penetrating glances. Unlike Sam, they made Becky feel a little uneasy. On occasion, Alex's eyes could be warm and friendly but when she was curious or out of sympathy, they had all the gentleness of a rapier. "How in heaven's name can you stand a thing like that?" She waved her hand toward Becky's uniform.

Becky knew this was coming, but hardly as the prelude to a week-end. She had expected it sometime Sunday afternoon, as a parting shot. Then she had determined not to get angry. She would maintain a rigid calm and marshal her forces with devastating effect. But Alex had taken her by surprise and she could feel her blood rise at a hot, swift pace.

"The only thing I worried about was whether or not the Navy could stand me."

"You like it?"

"I wouldn't be anyplace else—not even in Goshen."

"Not even in London?"

"As a Wave—yes. But now that I've had my taste of the Navy—as a civilian—no."

"I can't believe it." Alex shook her head in genuine astonishment. "You were doing a swell job there. Did the uniform get you?"

"I had a uniform in London."

"But Mainbocher didn't design it."

"Perhaps not, but it had a lot of significant stains on it Mainbocher couldn't design."

"That's just what I mean." Alex walked to the fireplace and leaned on the mantel. It was one of her characteristic poses during the heat of argument. "You were really in the war then."

Becky nodded. Her blood was beginning to cool. It felt to her throbbing veins somewhat like the temperature during the 35 below zero spell.

"You were there, too, Alex. Why did you come home?"

"I had to."

"So did I."

"But you could have gone back." Alex blew a tenuous stream of cigarette smoke above her head.

"I suppose I could have, after nine hundred thousand priorities got over. The same applies to you, too."

Alex's head came down sharply. "I've been lectur-

ing. They need lecturers who have seen the war at close quarters. There are too many people talking third hand."

"Who needs them?" Becky asked.

Alex looked at her with the tolerance of a parent explaining to a child that the earth is round. "The American public, dear."

"Do you think the American public needs a hypodermic to respond? I don't. When you begin losing your own men, you have a pretty good idea what the war's like. Let the Mrs. Colin Kellys do the talking."

Edna came back with a tray. On it, Sam hoped fervently, was the means whereby Alex might be mellowed to a point of non-belligerence. But Alex, for the moment, would not be distracted. She turned an exacting eye on Sam. "What do you think, Lieutenant?"

Faced with it, Sam sat up and folded his hands between his knees. "If I didn't agree with Becky, Mrs. Mecklin, I wouldn't be in uniform."

"You're a man. You belong in uniform."

"I'd be a lot more use closer to the war. Becky and her sort are making it possible for a good many of us to get over there who otherwise mightn't. Naturally I approve of that. I'd give anything to see a Wave or a Waac or what have you turn up to relieve me of my job. Most of us feel that way. Who the devil wants to fight a war from a desk?"

Edna served the drinks with apparent unconcern at

the electric atmosphere. Her face was more expressionless than Becky had ever seen a human countenance.

Alex sipped her cocktail slowly. "I don't see how you can expect efficiency from enough women to make any impression simply by throwing them into service uniforms. The profession of arms is the oldest in the world."

"But no one's shoving a gun in our hands, Alex, though I dare say there are a few of us who might do nearly as well as that Russian woman sniper. I don't think we're any less efficient than the English, either, and their women have certainly done a good job at the anti-aircraft guns when they've had the chance." Becky clasped her hands around her knees and leaned back. "But that isn't the point. You're asking for something to be proved that's already been proved. The defense plants are filled with women mechanics and specialists, a clerical expert is a clerical expert, man or woman—you would have said the same thing of those women——"

"I'm speaking of purely military jobs."

"Those *are* military jobs. Enlisted Waves are training men in synthetic gunnery and Link Trainers—good heavens, Alex, every time a class leaves Stillwater, Oklahoma, they release enough men to man a battleship, and that's only one of fifteen training schools. The training school in the Bronx feeds them into these specialty schools 2400 every two weeks—they're all relieving men and that adds up to a lot of them."

Alex put her cocktail down on the mantel. "All right. I'll give gracefully on that point. But when anyone can run a farm the way you do——"

Becky sat up. "Look, Alex, I admit farming's as important as anything else. But Olsen's running it better than I could and he's too old to enlist. At Northrop and Capen I know women who are lawyers, doctors, technicians. They had terrific careers and whopping incomes, and the chance with a war going on to have even bigger and better ones. And here they are, making fifty dollars a month, letting someone else take over their work or closing shop altogether. Now, why the devil do you think they did it? Some of them have families. They did it because the Navy said it needed them. They didn't have any ax to grind coming in and their worst enemies know they aren't feathering their nests. They had the stuff to fill a job that nobody else could fill, so they packed their duds, asked no questions and here they are. You've got to admit there's something in it when people like that join up."

Alex looked at Sam and smiled. "I think she likes the Navy." Sam returned her smile without enough enthusiasm to give her any hope of an ally.

"Those are facts," Becky said, coloring a little. Alex would never understand if she tried to explain her own, impregnable feeling for the Navy. She would accuse her of sentimentalism, though it went much too deep for any such superficial indulgence.

"I don't see how you stand the life at that school—all that marching and regimentation." Alex was like a dog with a bone, Becky thought. Only inch by inch would she allow it to be taken from her.

"I told you, I wouldn't be any place else. That goes for marching, regimentation and all the rest of it, now and to come. Does that answer your question?" Becky stood up. She wanted desperately to stretch.

Alex gave her a look, both curious and intense. "Yes. That answers it." She paused. "There must be something about it I missed."

"Plenty," Becky said.

* * * * *

In her room at last, Becky took off her uniform and got into a hot bath. She was glad the argument was over. It was disturbing to feel an uncontrollable desire to beat physically into one's hostess's head an understanding of such a simple thing as the value of releasing men who could fight when a war was going on. The trouble with Alex was that she disliked women's groups. Well, so had she until she discovered that they could really pull together. It didn't seem possible that bombs would have to fall before the WAVES, WAAC, Marines, Spars—any of them—made sense. Anyone who had seen as many women at war work as Alex had in London ought to know better. And the women here

who put on a Navy or Army uniform and left everything else behind them weren't impelled by the danger of imminent destruction. When your own home was bombed and your own people killed, you fought back instinctively. It took something again to be as unquestioning and as swift to protect the more intangible possessions; to have the courage to step into the unfamiliar ways of a man's life and, giving him to the things you couldn't do, say, "By your leave, sir," with a confidence that he could remember.

Becky sank down in the soothing heat of the water and sent the soap suds skidding around her. Sam had changed his tune a good deal in the last few weeks. She wondered how much was due to her and how much to indoctrination. She didn't think that he would try to put up a front. It might get past her, but it would never get past Alex. What he had said had rung true, and he had spoken as spontaneously as she might have done. Away from the farm and his restricted point of view, he had been indoctrinated by the evidence of his own eyes.

She got out her bath and dressed leisurely. It was luxurious to know that the ticking of the clock had no significance tonight. This was just what she needed: to walk slowly downstairs to the living room without the jar of the bell that sent her flying down Capen's stairs two at a time to muster in the biting cold of the driveway. Everyone needed a break in the routine some-

time. Otherwise the readjustment was apt to leave one in a state of numb acquiescence.

Dinner reminded her of Goshen. Another guest had arrived, an angular and scholarly-looking man named Rogers, whose face had an ascetic quality in the candle-light.

"I know everything is home grown in those wonderful greenhouses of yours, Alex," he enthused. "This doesn't taste like the fare I've been accustomed to."

"Quite right, George, it is," Alex said. "And with the hand of a miser, I have pulled up Bibb lettuce for my Kentucky guests."

"As far as I am concerned, then, the dinner is already a fabulous success," Becky said. "Where did you get the seed?"

"I bribed someone for it. I planted it myself and nursed it through its infancy. I really ought to include George's name with yours, because, although he is a former New England farmer, he is also a devotee of Bibb lettuce."

"A farmer?" Becky asked, with what she hoped was not obvious incredulity.

Rogers nodded. "I confess it, though I know Kentuckians find it hard to reconcile farming with rocky land. I wasn't, I might add, much of a success, or I wouldn't have gone back to a professor's life."

"George is at Harvard," Alex explained. "He is un-

doubtedly the leading authority in the East on Egyptology."

Becky saw with alarm that Sam was beginning to squirm. She was too far from him to kick him, so she leaned forward in the hope that she could obscure him from the professor's view. "How fascinating!" she said. "I went to Egypt one winter, but I am afraid I spent most of my time spending father's money on fake jewelry in the bazaars."

"There is much of it," Rogers said. "I am sure you also came home with a great deal of brass."

"Yes. A great deal," Becky confessed. "And I hate brass. Can you tell me, Mr. Rogers, what comes over tourists when they get into the bazaars?"

"That," he said, "is a phase of Egyptology that would require a lifetime of study. I should say it has to do with the childish instincts of the human race. You know, a throwback to the rattle stage."

Sam laughed.

"I remember a fine collection of brass ashtrays you once showed me," Alex said.

It's your turn, now, Becky thought, looking at the professor.

"Ah, yes," he said, coloring very faintly along his thin, high cheekbones. "My wife collected them."

Well, the women can take it, Becky told herself.

It was late when Alex left Becky and Sam before the fire.

"I'm not going to pretend you aren't glad I'm tossing in the sponge," she said. "I hope poor old George didn't bore you. I had to have him. He asked himself."

"I thought he was very interesting," Becky said.

"Which is, of course, deadly. But then anyone who studies Egyptology has just the barest right to be alive."

"Egyptology," Sam said, "is not one of my strong points. But few things academic ever were. I always preferred live-stock to dead."

"Which," Alex said to Becky, "is your cue to hit him over the head with a lamp."

"Now wait a moment," Sam said.

"See you tomorrow," Alex laughed. "A parting remark like that is equal to a good chaperone. Don't fight too late, children."

"What a woman!" Sam said.

"You will soon learn," Becky told him, "that it is futile to hope for the last word with Alex, unless your argument is stronger than she is."

"Which means it would have to have the strength of a brace of oxen," he replied ungallantly.

"I wouldn't have put it quite that way. But anyhow, you are somewhere near the head of the nail. By the way, thanks for backing me up this afternoon."

Sam studied his long fingers thoughtfully, then he

got up from his chair. "I backed you up because I thought you were right. You believe in it. That's a great thing, Becky—to believe in anything."

"Don't you?" she asked. "Why on earth," she wondered, "did she wait like a child for a piece of candy to hear the answer she wanted."

He leaned his arms on the mantel and stared at the fire. Along his high, slanting cheekbones a copper glow spread and flickered. "There's a guy at Dow Field who has a printing shop in some little town in Illinois. His wife's running it now, and he's a private first class answering a lot of wacky questions. He's itching to get where the fighting's going on. He was talking to me about it one day. I felt sorry for him. He's a great, big bruiser and he hates the Nazis like I hate a drought. He said, 'Why can't one of those dames in uniform come up here and answer these dopes. Hell, I want a gun in my fist, not a pen.' You may be sure I thought of you."

"Then you've got the general idea—about us. How about you?"

He turned to face her. There was a curious, an almost puzzled expression in his eyes. "It's still hard for me to say, 'I'm willing to kill a man.' I've spent too long breeding life."

"Until you get a diseased animal, and then you destroy it."

"Yes. You destroy it then." He moved to the long

window and stood looking out, for an eternity, it seemed to Becky. There was nothing he could see in the blackness of the night, unless he was looking through the equal darkness of a Kentucky winter night to the dim light of a brood mare barn, seeing within it the slender, long-legged body of a new-born foal, and its mare, wild-eyed with weakness and pain. That was what Sam knew of the mystery and struggle of birth. He couldn't understand killing life when you exhausted yourself to preserve it. That sense of preservation was basic with any farmer, yet they, and Sam, too, knew when to kill.

Finally, he turned around. "That's what I've told myself. I've kept saying it so I can want to fight, and now I do. When I wanted that, the first time, I wanted someone like you to give me a chance to do it. You see, I meant what I said to Alex."

He sat down beside her and folded her hands between the broad palms of his own.

"I guess I'm slow to convince about some things, Becky."

"But you're sure when you get there. That's important."

"I think so. I was sure about you from the first, though. And you know what I want."

The tingling of her nerves was like an alarm. "I guess I do, Sam. But I can't answer you yet. I'm not sure myself."

"You will be." He laughed uneasily. "I wasn't born in Virginia for nothing, darling. We're the only men in the world who really understand women."

"You mean Virginia women."

"If you weren't born in Virginia, I mean any women."

"Sam, your conceit is overpowering." She tried to find humor in his gray eyes, but there was none to see. They were steady, intense, telling her things that she couldn't let him say.

"It doesn't matter to me what I overpower you with at first." The softness of his voice was like a caress. "You know I wouldn't talk to you like this if I didn't know that you loved me a little in your own preoccupied way."

She drew away from him. "What do you mean, preoccupied?"

"There's another gent somewhere. I've been trying to figure it out for a long time. He's no Kentuckian and he's nothing like me, and he's good enough to stand between us."

She met his eyes squarely. "There was."

He looked down. "Don't!" she wanted to cry out. "Don't look away from me! You never do."

"I see. All right, Becky. You call the tune from now on."

"It might be better for you," she told him.

It was blissful relaxation when Sam turned the car out of the driveway Sunday afternoon. In many ways the week-end had been a great success. Alex had taken them over the farm after a morning of such sleep that Becky felt ready to face the next six months of reveille. There had been no mention of the Navy until it was time to go.

"You ought to come down to Northampton for a review, Alex. We're having one for Mrs. Roosevelt on Saturday. I think you might enjoy it." Becky extended the invitation without much hope that Alex would accept, but to her surprise she said, "I think I will."

Now that it was all over, Becky wanted to get back to Capen House and the familiar routine: the bells, the regularity of everything, the sense of getting on with the job. She wanted to be surrounded by Wave uniforms and talk to Midshipmen and officers who thought and felt as she did. She wanted to stand in line at the Hotel, waiting for mess, and hear Emmy Brad-dock swing *Ginny the Ninny* on the lounge piano. Miss Colt would be Officer of the Day and she would be sharing a "good one" with Mrs. Grant. Then, after mess, the company would march back under the frosty stars, and they would swing along at a brisk cadence, thinking of the blazing logs in the fireplace at Capen House, and the last cigarette before the study bell. They would sing, and it would probably be *Hup, Two, Three, Four* and *Waves of the Navy*. Everyone would

be ready for taps at ten. It would be good to crawl into warm bunks. For a while brains would be busy with ships and aircraft for the quiz on Monday, but the ships and aircraft would soon take on fantastic forms and become part of a dream.

"You haven't seen the last of me," Sam told her when they parted in front of Capen House.

The responsive pressure of her hand drew him closer. "Not here," she laughed. "There'll be other times."

"You mean that?"

"Probably many others."

She watched his car until it was out of sight. Then, when she turned to run up the stairs, she realized that her pulses were racing.

* * * * *

The big events came in rapid succession: the Midshipmen's Show, the Regimental Review for Mrs. Roosevelt, Graduation. The six weeks of indoctrination were speeding to an end, and eager as she was for a billet, Becky wished for the day that she had arrived, if she could begin by knowing the officers and her "shipmates" as she did now. Miss Lawrence had said, "You will look back on these as the happiest days of your Navy career." Becky was glad she had realized that for so

long, so she'd never have to say, "You should have appreciated it while you had it."

Rehearsals for the show gave Capen House, during the free hours, the atmosphere of a stock show backstage. Goss had written a new song—a tune as catchy as *A Guy To Tie My Tie*, and Betty Wethered, a serious, middle-aged woman whom Becky had never known well enough to discover that she had a good many song hits to her credit, was elected to write the lyrics.

With Perkins aboard, it seemed inevitable that there should be a "Goon Platoon," and the choice of platoon leader fell unanimously on her. After one rehearsal that had the onlookers sick with laughter, Perkins came to Becky in abject confusion.

"Please tell me what to do!" she begged. "I don't know how to turn them or anything when they get started and I keep marching them into things."

Becky looked at the solemn members of the platoon. Some wore hats too large, some, hats too small; they had swapped suits so that the large had the small and the small the large, a distribution not calculated to enhance the beauty of the best looking Wave.

"That's the point, Perkins," Becky said. "This is supposed to be funny."

Perkins eyed her suspiciously. "I know it is. But I've got to do some of the things right."

"It'll come to you," Becky told her.

"If we're going to take off Mrs. Barker, we ought

to have one of the officers in on the thing to tell us when we're getting too funny." Goss spoke as she played, softly improvising.

"Miss Connelly," someone suggested.

Goss shook her head. "We're taking her off, too."

"Who aren't we taking off?"

"Miss Lawrence."

"Then ask her."

"Not me," Goss said.

"I'll ask her," Becky volunteered. "What's the matter, Goss? Are you afraid of her?"

"No, of course not. There are just some I can ask favors of and some I can't. It would be my luck to get her in her formal mood."

Becky frowned. "You've got her wrong, Goss."

Goss nodded and broke into *Waves of the Navy*.
"All right, but you ask her."

"Are we rehearsing at the 'Y' tomorrow?"

"Yes. 1600. The last rehearsal. It's got to be good."

"I'll ask Lawrence in the morning."

"By the way, Becky," Goss asked, "what's your little contribution going to be?"

"Prop boy," Becky replied quickly.

"The devil it is. We need another act."

"Well, we've still got the gym department to work on. Virginia and I will get a few of us together who can murder 'Picking up Paw-Paws.' If Communications would just lend us Ann Barrett——"

"Fat chance. They're doing their own show. Ten to one if she doesn't do 'Barrett Preparing for Captain's Inspection,' she'll do 'Picking up Paw-Paws.'"

In a corner a quartet was singing *Ensign Swenson*, to the tune of *Jenny*.

"Where did we get that?" Becky asked.

"Someone from the first class lent it to us."

"Sounds to me like it's going *Jenny* one better. I don't think we can get away with it."

"We're going to try. Say," Goss swung around on the bench, "do you think we can get one of Miss Connelly's hats?"

"What do you mean, one of them? There couldn't be two of them!"

"Well, I've tried everywhere to get a hat like it. Filene's say it must have been a mistake. They'll make us one that'll do if I can describe it, but I couldn't."

"Who could?"

"Do you think Johnson can get that 'Pipe down' so it'll rattle the rafters?"

"If she can't, we might get Miss Connelly to stand off-stage and give her own rendition."

* * * * *

On the threshold of Miss Lawrence's office, Becky wondered what burst of confidence had made her volunteer to ask this favor. It was obvious that Miss

Lawrence was as busy as a bird dog on a game preserve. She was getting ready for an incoming class of seamen, which seemed to involve endless pounding of the typewriter, diving back into the pile of papers on her desk, then attacking the typewriter with renewed vigor. It was hardly the time to ask her to turn stage director.

Becky knocked on the open door and waited for Miss Lawrence to look up. She waited several moments.

"Oh, hello. Come in." Miss Lawrence turned away from her typewriter. "Sit down."

Becky took the chair beside her desk. Miss Lawrence's manner surprised her. It had the easy informality of a meeting between old friends. Becky had noticed that, even with her fellow officers, Miss Lawrence did not entirely lose her rather stiff dignity, and it was this that made the tone of their own meeting puzzle her a little. Perhaps this was the difference between the status of the seaman and the Midshipman—a military difference that good officers observed with infinite finesse. Miss Lawrence would be one of those officers. A stickler for military discipline and etiquette, she would carry the tempering qualities all the way through—just as she had at the farewell party.

"I have come to ask a favor," Becky said. There was no good beating around the bush.

Miss Lawrence nodded. "Cigarette?" She extended

a package. Becky took one and lighted her own and Miss Lawrence's.

"I was right," she thought, "when I told Goss she had her wrong. I wish Ann could see her like this."

She noticed a faint sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of Miss Lawrence's nose and a provocative curve at the corners of her mouth. There was no doubt that, at close quarters and in this mood, little remained of the formality that kept Goss at a distance.

"Company 6 would like you to direct its show," Becky said.

Miss Lawrence's eyes widened in perplexity. "Me—direct a show? I haven't the foggiest notion how it's done."

"All you have to do is put the brakes on us, Lieutenant. We're—uh—taking off some of the staff. We don't want to go too far. Not with finals coming up afterwards." Becky laughed.

Miss Lawrence looked a little uneasy. "That's sort of putting me on the spot, isn't it?"

Becky thought of what they were doing to Mrs. Barker. "Not intentionally. It's all in good spirits."

"I think Miss Connelly would do a better job."

"We're taking her off."

"You're not having her fall over your luggage?"

"How did you know about that?"

"Everyone on the station knows about it. She told it in wine mess."

"That was pretty awful, wasn't it?"

"Well, you do have a lot of luggage," Miss Lawrence countered. "But what are you doing to her?"

"It's just her hat and the way she suddenly turns up in the passageway after taps, when we think she's tucked safely in bed, and yells 'Pipe down!' Scares the living gizzard out of us."

"What's the matter with her hat?" Miss Lawrence cast a quick glance at her own, lying on the mantelpiece.

"The brim is very tired and the hat is very big. She doesn't give her face a chance."

"You Midshipmen notice everything, don't you? Well, when do you want me?"

"At the 'Y' tomorrow—1600."

"I'll be there."

* * * * *

When Miss Lawrence arrived at the "Y," Becky noticed that she wore a new hat. Her eyes fell on it at once, then met Miss Lawrence's challenging glance. Suddenly they both laughed.

"You didn't think I'd take any chances, did you?"

"It's always better to be on the safe side," Becky agreed.

Rehearsals were in progress. Miss Lawrence walked into a room off the hall and straight into a broad view

of a dozen pairs of blue button-leg pants. "What is this?"

The owners' heads came up sharply.

"The gym skit," Becky explained. "That's the one I'm in. I have to whistle them on the stage the way Ensign Nichols does—through her teeth—and put them through the paces."

"Oh!" Miss Lawrence smiled weakly, as if she were making an effort to visualize the staff's reaction to this unconventional exposure.

"I don't think you have to worry about that skit," Becky said.

Miss Lawrence looked doubtful but allowed herself to be directed toward another room where Mrs. Barker and Miss Connelly were being hilariously taken to pieces and put together again as the midshipmen saw them. Before they reached the door Perkins and her platoon came down the hall on the double. She saw Miss Lawrence, colored quickly and began to wring her hands in confusion.

"Oh, platoon, stop—please stop—halt!" she skipped to the front rank and seized the arm of the right guide.

"Is this," Miss Lawrence inquired, "part of the show?"

Perkins nodded.

Miss Lawrence smiled. "I don't believe it needs rehearsing." She cut in front of the platoon.

"What do you suppose she meant by that?" Perkins asked.

Janet Overton looked like Mrs. Barker. With the aid of a small pillow here and there she had acquired the outstanding features of Mrs. Barker's figure. She was going through the episode of the yeoman in the Commandant's office, "his little hands at his side"—there was a tremble in her voice and the Barker tilt of the head.

Miss Lawrence began to laugh. "I know who that is."

"Do you think she'll mind?"

"She'll probably cut her arms off at the elbows before she ever gives another lecture, but I don't think she'll mind."

"Is she very sensitive?" Becky asked nervously.

"When the Midshipmen give a show," Miss Lawrence told her, "everyone throws sensitiveness to the winds."

A figure strode across the room, stretching her skirt to the full limit of Filene's seams. Her hat sat well up on her forehead and down in the back to the nape of her neck, obscuring all but a strand of tightly drawn back hair on either side. She paused, opened an imaginary door and poked her head in. "Pipe down!" she bawled, and there was a crash as of someone falling out of a bunk.

"Miss Connelly," Miss Lawrence said. "She will be sorry she ever left Holyoke."

"You missed the first part of it. The Midshipmen in the room are singing—but softly, and I have a feeling you'll think it ought to be even softer. Sing it again, girls," Becky called.

The Midshipmen began to chant.

"It's called Bu 3."

"Bu 3?"

"Can you remember back as far as your physical?"

"Yes—" Miss Lawrence said apprehensively.

"Do you remember the third booth?"

"Cut it out!" Miss Lawrence ordered before the quartet had finished the first bar of the refrain. There was a high spot of color in her cheeks.

* * * * *

Company 6 was surprised to find Sage Hall filled to capacity. Overton spotted Mrs. Barker in the audience and returned shakily to the dressing-room. "She'll hang me on the tree for this," she groaned. "I'll be demoted to seaman! She's wearing that Advanced Indoctrination face."

"You can't quit now," Becky said.

Perkins was wandering around absently in the wings, mumbling to herself.

Miss Lawrence sat in the dressing-room and eyed the "gym class" nervously.

Slowly the lights dimmed. Behind the drawn curtains, the lectern stood ready for Overton.

"I think I'm going to be sick," she said.

"The devil you are," Becky answered.

The curtains rippled apart. Becky and Miss Lawrence watched the audience from the wings. Overton, very white around the gills, moistened her lips, clasped her hands close to her chest and walked onto the stage. A burst of laughter greeted her. Someone in front whispered "Mrs. Barker. Where is she?" and peered around.

Becky's hands were as clammy as she imagined Overton's clasped ones were. How would Mrs. Barker take it? She watched her, sitting four rows back in the center. She saw Overton, too, cast her eyes in that direction as often as she dared. At first Mrs. Barker looked as if she were saying, "Hold your hat, you're going for a ride." An officer was poking her in the back and laughing. Then when Overton came to the "flowers in the hair" episode and Mrs. Barker's interpretation of the Wave's social obligations toward the male officer, the twitching corners of Mrs. Barker's mouth relaxed in uncontrollable laughter. Overton permitted herself one grateful smile and warmed to her act. "His little hands, straight at his sides, shamed the Women's Reserve——"

Mrs. Barker hid her face in her hands, but her shoulders were shaking. Overton had to wait for the

noise from the audience to subside. Why hadn't someone told her Mrs. Barker was such a good sport? She performed the rest of her act with the ease of a born mimic, permitting other thoughts to run through her mind as she spoke her lines. "I will study Personnel as I never studied it before. I will get a 4.0. I will be her prize pupil for the way she's taken it. Good old Barker!"

Overton left the stage beaming.

"That certainly got over," Miss Lawrence said.

"It was great!" Becky told her. "Did you see Mrs. Barker? She loved it."

"Wasn't she wonderful!" Overton breathed, reverently.

Becky watched her retreating back. She should have told her Mrs. Barker would take it like that.

The show was a great success. Miss Connelly's deep, infectious laugh could be heard unmistakably, from the balcony to the stage, and the Physical Education instructors came backstage to ask Becky and her cast to give a private performance of "Picking up Paw-Paws."

"Did the Captain look as if we went too far in the Gym skit?"

"If he did, you'd never know it," Miss Nichols said. "He was laughing himself sick. By the way, how do you whistle between your teeth when you haven't got a space there?"

Becky demonstrated. Then she said, "Excuse me while I tell Miss Lawrence about the captain. I think our act gave her acute indigestion."

As long as she lived, Becky was certain that she would never forget the Personnel class the day following the Midshipmen's show. She wasn't sure who was the most embarrassed—Mrs. Barker or the class. There was a strained silence when the company was seated, the door opened, and Mrs. Barker, without so much as a glance at the Midshipmen, took her place at the lectern. Gingerly, she tested it and there were a few tentative giggles. The class looked down at their notebooks, poised pens above them and waited for the lecture to begin. After waiting for several moments, they looked up and realized that Mrs. Barker was staring at them and blushing.

"Unfortunately," she said, "the lecture for today is a summary of naval etiquette."

The class restrained its laughter. They didn't want to rub it in.

"I didn't plan the lecture or you can be sure it would have been on another subject." She started to clasp her hands before her, then put them hastily behind her back. She started to speak, paused, then raising her head looked the class squarely in the face. "Somehow, I feel strangely self-conscious." She looked

at her hands. "I don't know what to do with them except to cut them off."

The class roared. Becky wondered if she ought to bring them to order, but their appreciation of Mrs. Barker's good humor was so spontaneous she couldn't make herself do it. Furthermore, she didn't think Mrs. Barker would want her to.

The lecture was punctuated with the laughter of the class, and Mrs. Barker's painful efforts to articulate through some phases of her subject. When, at the end of the hour, she gathered up her notes and turned to leave the room, the Midshipmen rose and applauded her until the front door of Burton Hall had closed behind her.

9

ALEX CAME to the Review. Becky had almost forgotten that she had invited her, when the Officer of the Watch came to her, twenty minutes before lunch muster, and said, "There is a Mrs. Mecklin to see you."

Becky turned to Virginia. "You've got to help me. Bring down my coat and hat and purse—oh, yes, and my gloves. I have a guest and I don't know what to do with her."

"O. K.," Virginia said, and sped upstairs.

Becky went into the living-room, where the Officer of the Watch dealt with all visitors. Alex was engaging her in a conversation in which Midshipman Talbott was evidently trying, with all graciousness, to talk to Alex, assort the mail, and answer the telephone. Becky rescued her on the brink of desperation.

"I can hardly believe you're here," she said, as the two exchanged a peck on the cheek. "I didn't think you'd remember."

"Remember!" Alex exclaimed robustly. "I've hardly been able to wait. You said a good many things that I am sorry to admit have kept me awake at night." She moved back and put an accusing eye on Becky. "You didn't give me much idea of when this was to take place. I called up and found out for myself. Are you sure you wanted me to come?"

"I can't think of anybody I'd rather have," Becky said truthfully.

"I want to see it enough not to doubt that," Alex told her. "But I can tell by the look in your face and the madding crowd that something is imminent. What is it?"

"Lunch muster," Becky explained.

Alex's eyebrows shot up. "I love you dearly, but not even for you will I march admiringly with the rear guard. I shall see you take off and then grab a taxi."

"It's no walk at all to town by the short cut," Becky reminded her.

"I never walk when I can ride," Alex insisted. "I'll get a bite at the White House and meet you wherever you say."

"You know where the athletic field is?"

"I will never forget it," Alex said.

"It's the drill field, now, and it has been cleared of snow and manicured to a T for Mrs. Roosevelt."

Alex nodded wisely. "Say no more. I know the very

spot to make for. There's a certain tree I used to hide behind during hockey practice."

"But that's no way to see it," Becky protested. "I'm sure Miss Connelly——"

"I know Miss Connelly's charming, whoever she is, but I prefer to see this in my own way," Alex announced emphatically. "I'll come back here whenever you tell me to."

"I'll be free at two," Becky said.

Becky mustered her company outside Capen at one-thirty. There was a tautness about their ranks and an immaculateness about their uniforms, from well-brushed hats and gleaming white shirts to polished shoes, that gave her a thrilling sense of pride in leading them. Just enough nervous excitement ran through the company to straighten their backs and lift their heads to the degree of perfection that was not always achieved during the ordinary day.

Miss Connelly swept the ranks with a critical eye. Her long face was set, but it never entirely lost its promise of humor.

"I don't want you to forget for one single minute when you go onto the parade ground that the impression you'll make today is one of the most important you'll ever make. And if any of you has the idea you'll be considered as a bunch of women marching, get it

out of your heads. The same precision and bearing is expected of you as if you were a company of men. That holds true any time in the Women's Reserve but I especially want you to concentrate on it today. And when you get the command 'Eyes right!' turn those heads with a snap. It's a salute. Make it look like one! All right, Company Commander. Take over."

Becky noticed, marching her company to the parade ground, that even Perkins was in step. She could see the concentration of effort in her compressed lips and the frequent lowering of her eyes to the marching feet before her. Even her arms swung in unison with the others, a nicety that had eluded her until this day.

They came down the hill beside Paradise Pond in resounding cadence, and crossed the arched bridge onto the field. Heavy rains of the week before had loosed the ice, and through the gaps water tumbled over the fall and swept on beneath the marching feet. All about the field the wintry hills rose like an amphitheater. It seemed to Becky that every blue clad figure, from their Regimental and Battalion Commanders, Lieutenant Crandall, Lieutenant Grant, and their adjutants, down to the last rank of Midshipmen before her, had never moved with such precision and bearing as they did this day; and her sensitive ear could not detect a single break behind her in that even, exciting sound.

When they came to parade rest opposite the reviewing stand, a sudden breeze whipped the folds of the

colors in symbolic motion. Across the field, Becky recognized the unmistakable figure of Mrs. Roosevelt, who stood, tall and stately, beside Captain Evans. Beyond the reviewing party, groups of Northampton's civilians, muffled in heavy coats, dotted the field and the upward slope of ground.

Further up on the hill, alone somewhere, would be Alex. In a certain sense it was the impression Alex would get of this review that concerned Becky most—Alex who was representative of all the people who had yet to learn that women could take responsibility as seriously and efficiently as any man, and love this "Man's Navy" with the same unquestioning devotion. She hoped Alex would have a lump in her throat as big as an apple when a thousand Waves, in company mass formation, passed the reviewing stand, eyes right, their gloved hands like a myriad synchronized pendulums.

The band struck up a march and circled the field. Becky's pulses throbbed to the music, profoundly stirring in the placid setting.

"Regiment——!"

"Battalion——!"

"Company——!"

"Platoon——!"

In consecutive order the commands rang out, echoing faintly across the hills.

"Atten-shun!"

The regiment brought heels together and arms to the side in simultaneous movement.

"Right—face!" The Regiment turned as if on a single pivot."

"Pass in review!" Miss Randall commanded. Then she and Lieutenant Grant and their staffs marched up the field to meet the Review.

The Regiment moved forward, stepping out smartly. No company, Becky felt, marching before her own, would stir more pride and admiration than the 6th. The cadent beat of their feet upon the frozen ground as thrilling as the vibrant beat of the drum, and the fluttering folds of the colors carried before them, told her what she could not see for herself—that every Midshipman behind her, as those before, had felt the same impelling urge to demonstrate today that they were "Navy"—in training and spirit and all that a glorious word implied. Her heart, she knew, had not behaved in such unorthodox fashion since the London days, when the first eerie note of the air-raid siren split the air with its alarming wail. All the hope and pride and expectations of perfection she had ever dreamed of were in her voice when she gave the command—"Eyes right!" In a fraction of time, she blessed Miss Lawrence for those early days of discipline, and Miss Connelly because something she believed, that Becky would never be sure of, had put her in command of the company.

The colors whipped before them on a gusty wind. Becky was reluctant to take her eyes from them. She could see them flying in every part of the world where the war was being fought; she could see Ronnie in Africa under equally significant colors; and then she saw Sam, in his slow, Kentucky manner, unable to resist the tradition of unquestioning service that could be written into every star. Today they were inspiring the Waves.

Mrs. Roosevelt smiled. It was not a tired, patterned smile. It was a smile of understanding and of pride in all the things that she had been claiming for women's integrity and faith and determination. Perhaps Becky imagined it, but something had come from the eyes of the President's wife: something that said, "Well done, Midshipmen. I shall remember you." Certainly Captain Evans and his staff would remember them because, although she couldn't see very clearly, Becky was sure that the calm pulses among the reviewers were in the minority.

Alex was waiting for her at Capen House when she returned from the Review. Becky was tired—more tired after marching twice around a field no larger than her hemp field than she had been through the entire indoctrination period. She realized, when she thought of it, that she was emotionally tired; but at the same time, the sense of gratification was so strong whenever she remembered Miss Connelly's remark to the com-

pany before they broke ranks at Capen, that it sent little shivers along her spine.

"You marched like veterans, I'm proud to claim you—" and then she had stopped Becky on the steps. "Miss McLeod, you can forget it was your luggage I fell over the day you became a member of the Capen House company!"

Becky drew Alex to the sofa. "Let's sit down a minute."

Alex lit a cigarette and looked at the glowing tip. "That was an impressive review," she said. "I have to confess to a lump in the throat."

"Then it must have been good." Becky laughed. She wished, instead of passing it off like this, that she could describe to Alex what the day had meant to her, but she doubted if she could put it into words for anyone. It was all bound up with her pride in the company and her feeling for the weeks behind her. It wasn't the sort of thing you talked about easily.

"You look tired," Alex observed. "Can't we go somewhere and have tea and generally relax?"

"If there was only a quiet place—you know—an Inn in the country." Becky dropped down onto the sofa. "I want you to meet my old roommate, Ann Barrett. Let's go by the Hotel and get her."

"There's a place called the Whale Inn. Have you ever been there?"

Becky shook her head. "After I leave Northampton,

I will hear about all the charming places I could have gone on liberty."

"Well, this isn't exactly what you have in mind, but it will be a change."

* * * * *

Becky found Ann in her room. "I have a friend downstairs who wants to take us to a place called the Whale Inn for tea."

"What's the matter?" Ann asked. "Has Beckman's burned down?"

"I need peace and quiet," Becky said.

"Did the Review get you?"

"Didn't it get you—at all?"

"Yeh—it got me. We were good, weren't we?"

"I thought we were."

"I just realized—that's the last one for you, isn't it?"

"Yes—the last one."

"You'll be gone in a week. And I'll still be here, come six weeks."

"I'd like to be staying," Becky said.

Ann laughed. "Don't be crazy. I'd like staying, too, if you were. I haven't seen much of you lately, but it's good to know you're up the hill. What am I going to do without anyone to grouse to, bub?"

"Quit grouching," Becky said.

Ann looked at her teasingly. "I can see you're not in the mood to play."

"I guess I'm not."

"All right. Come on. Maybe tea will put you back in form, though heaven knows, if I were as low as you are, it wouldn't do much for me. What you need is a good, stiff——"

"I know," Becky said.

Ann paused, colored a little and looked embarrassed. "By the way, don't buy yourself any collar bars. I've already ordered them. I want to send you off the right way. If they make you a jg, you can darned well foot the bill for the gold ones and I'll get you a pair of silver bars."

Becky looked at her and shook her head. "You shouldn't have done it, Ann, but I'm glad you did."

Ann and Alex seemed to like each other from the first. It didn't surprise Becky that Alex should like Ann, who could make any meeting effortless and full of fun right from the introduction. But it did surprise her that Ann should find Alex apparently so easy to talk to in a casual and friendly way. Alex usually froze for the first few minutes following any introduction, as if, in that frigid space of time, she was forming a lasting impression. Perhaps because Ann had given her no more chance to speculate than she had given

Becky the first day in N45, Alex was willing to concede the first round, and having done so, realized the futility of trying to absorb Ann in one meeting.

Ann said, "How do you do," and then added, looking first at Becky and then at Alex, "Do you type, Mrs. Mecklin?"

The question obviously took Alex off her guard. After a moment's hesitation, she replied, "Yes, but not terribly well."

Ann waved her hand. "The degree doesn't matter. You and a typewriter feel you might get to know each other better in time?"

For the first time in her life, Becky was certain Alex looked puzzled. Finally she said, "If a typewriter doesn't take offense at the hunt and peck system, we might."

"That's good enough," Ann said. "You and I are about the same size. It might be re-distributed a bit to your advantage, but all the same, in a pinch, you could drape my uniform around you. Would you mind taking a typing test for me tomorrow—life or death hangs on it."

"Will you start at the beginning?" Alex asked.

"Just a minute," Becky interrupted. "This afternoon, as I understood it, was to soothe my troubled soul. Do you mind continuing this conversation over tea?"

The conversation continued over cup after cup of tea in the pleasant atmosphere of the Whale Inn. Never before, that Becky could remember, was she obviously a spectator at what might have been a three-way conversation. Refusing to be offended, she took refuge in the English muffins and marmalade, and listened with mounting incredulity to the verbal evidence that Alex, as well as she, was willing to give way to Ann's nonsense.

Ann said solemnly, "I had but one thing to give to the Navy, and that is my charm. I would have been irresistible in Procurement, but they put me into something that demands among other things that I learn to type forty words a minute without a mistake." She looked at her slender fingers. "I can type twelve words a minute with five mistakes. I keep telling my typing instructor that it can't be done, but she says it can, if I apply myself. Apply myself! Ye gods, I practice two hours a day, and when my fingers are paralyzed, she creeps around in back of me and yells, 'Relax!' I jump out of my skin and darn near burst into tears."

"They won't hold you up on account of that," Becky said.

"Don't you believe it! I'll be beating a typewriter the day the Peace Treaty's signed."

"That's my quarrel with the women's services," Alex said. "They pour them into jobs regardless of qualifications——"

"What do you mean?" Ann asked. Becky saw that her face was taking on a dangerously belligerent expression.

"More or less what I said," Alex replied.

"I have the highest average in the class in two other courses. I just can't learn to type." Ann looked at Alex much as a duellist looks at his antagonist at a hundred paces. "If I had the stuff for Procurement, I would have gotten it."

Alex laughed, and put her hand on Ann's arm. "You must deal gently with me," she said. "Conversion is a slow process, and I am being converted in seven days."

After they had left Ann at the Hotel, Alex said, abruptly, "Tell me about your Lieutenant."

The request startled Becky. "There's not much to tell you about him, Alex. He's a neighbor of mine in Goshen."

"It's obvious that he's in love with you. Are you going to marry him?"

Becky felt that she should have known Alex would approach even the most personal subjects with this directness. "I don't know. I haven't thought about it very much."

"Why not?"

"I suppose he is playing against a rather overpowering foil."

"You're an idiot," Alex said.

"Perhaps."

"Becky," Alex said, more gently, "the world is filled with women who hold such futile things before them, and miss the good things that are left. I think I have an idea of what you are holding before you. Two and two can't make anything but four, and you have only just come back from England—it couldn't be anyone but an Englishman with all the devastating charm of the race." She waited for a response, but Becky continued to look at her without a single betrayal of emotion. "You don't encourage my gauchery," she said, "but I feel bound to tell you that I know something of men, and I think you would be very foolish not to think twice about Sam."

"What has he done to deserve this?" Becky laughed, self-consciously.

"Nothing but look at me with the eye of an adder because I happened, in a misguided moment, to disagree with you."

"That was very rude of him," Becky said.

"Not at all," Alex replied. "It was instinctive and sincere, and as far as I can see, you haven't good sense if you wait for more than he has to give."

"I don't think I will," Becky answered.

10

BECKY KNEW that the day before graduation should be as exciting to her as it apparently was to all the other Midshipmen in Capen House, who haunted Miss Connelly's office, hoping for their orders. And yet she felt much as she had the day before she and her mother had sailed from England. Although she had gained something to replace it, she was leaving much behind her: the first mysteries of Navy life that had become so much a part of her daily existence that she would never remember them without thinking of Northampton; the gradual comprehension of an experiment so vast that she could not question any phase of it. What was expected of her was as clear as her job in the canteen had been: as clear as the duty of every man who sailed East or West; who flew against the Nazi or the Japanese. It was the job that she would be asked to do, day by day, week by week, in the

undeviating labor of helping to win the war. Whatever she lacked, she would be expected to learn.

She would leave behind her an infinite number of exciting experiences and amusing diversions; she would leave people whom she had known six weeks and felt closer to than many of her oldest friends. Marching to Faunce with the company to return their books, she felt the surging of a hundred memories: frantic days of examinations, the subsequent relief of lectures and movies; officers going to and fro along the narrow paths, before the envious glances of seamen and Midshipmen. The peaceful, leisurely atmosphere of Northampton—a balm during the hectic activities of the day. That would be one of the most difficult of all pleasures to relinquish.

Filene's, too, where Midshipmen drifted in and out all morning, taking away with them jackets that bore the Ensign's stripe, had its own place in the parade of memories. Becky thought of Ann, who had complained so loudly about the fit of her uniform and design of the hat, and yet, who, when she wore the uniform, went striding along with something in her step that bore little resemblance to the slouch she affected in civilian clothes.

Becky thought of all of them, trying to appear more interested in the fit of their jackets than in the fact that they could scarcely take their eyes from the gold Navy buttons and Wave insignia. Funny how self-conscious

they were the first day in uniform, and yet how proud to be followed by the curious glances of civilians, "They're from the Midshipmen's School." They had been reluctant to admit then that, even if their uniforms had hung like sacks, they wouldn't have traded them for sables and a suit by Bendel.

At lunch mess, Lieutenant Grant called Becky out of the waiting line. "How would you like to be a color bearer tonight at the Red Cross Rally in Springfield?"

"I've never been a color bearer before—but if you think I'll do it all right—" She would rather have promised to learn Chinese before morning than admit to Lieutenant Grant that any request she made of her was not reasonable. Mrs. Grant was not the sort of person to whom one would admit reluctance to do anything from sheer lack of experience. She gave too strong an impression, herself, of cool confidence and efficiency.

She had been to Becky, throughout the Indoctrination period, an impressive figure whose insistence upon military detail was tempered by a sense of humor and a great capacity for understanding the problems of women in a military world. Her duties as Battalion Commander seldom brought her into personal association with the Midshipmen, yet all were aware of her as a leader, feeling the force of her personality as a symbol of their own ambitions.

Mrs. Grant's throaty voice recalled Becky's wandering thoughts. "Of course you'll be all right. The same thing happened to me when I'd just come into the Navy. I was scared to death, but there wasn't really anything to it. All you do is march down the auditorium, go up on the stage and stand at attention with the colors. When they play the 'Star Spangled Banner' you dip them and hold them at the dip until it's over. The rest of the evening you sit and listen to what, I believe, are going to be some very interesting speeches. I'm going to ask Miss Buchanan to go, too. We'll pick you up at six-thirty."

"Aye, aye, Lieutenant," Becky answered.

Nothing during the day had given Becky such a sense of the imminence of commissioning as the ride to Springfield in the station wagon with Mrs. Grant, Miss Lawrence, Miss Colt, and Buchanan. It was difficult not to feel on level ground with officers who put the Midshipmen so completely at their ease. They drew them into conversation, swapping stories of their own training in the first days of the school, when a bed was the sole piece of furniture in quarters, and skeptical male officers drilled them with what seemed to be a determination to discover just how much they could take.

By the time they reached Springfield, Becky realized that what she was representing tonight was not alone

the Midshipmen's School as she knew it, but as they knew it, too, from the first days of the Women's Reserve—the days of the "Brain Trusters." Mrs. Grant had thought enough of her and Buchanan to put that responsibility in their hands.

Buchanan leaned toward Becky. Her swarthy, handsome face looked agitated. "I hope we don't drop them."

"Drop what?"

"The colors. They weigh a ton. I carried the standard once in a parade and I wasn't the same Buchanan for a week afterward."

"What a thought!" Becky laughed. "What a noble way to end indoctrination."

They didn't drop them, but their confidence wasn't restored by the size of the Navy, Marine and Army men who were carrying colors, too, and set the Waves a stride down the aisle that was only meant for the legs of an Amazon.

Becky was too intent on the stability of the regimental colors unfurled above her head to notice the audience filling the vast auditorium to capacity. When she was first aware of it, standing at attention with her precious burden before a sea of faces, something like an electric shock raced the length of her spine. To all these people, at this moment, she and Buchanan *were* the Waves. The impression they were creating now would be a lasting one and would reflect upon the offi-

cers who had trained them, upon the school, upon everyone who had gone out before them. In a moment, Mrs. Grant, Miss Lawrence and Miss Colt would take their places in the front line of chairs, waiting for the speakers and the guests of honor. They would want to take them with pride and Becky felt the desire that they should do so like a physical force.

These people who had come here tonight were fighting the war, too. It seemed to her that every voluntary organization in the country was represented, and the presence of every civilian who sat before her spoke for their number, thousands of times over, who were doing something in their own way.

Tomorrow, many new officers would go out again among these people who would expect so much of them because they had their youth or the vitality or the independence to put on a uniform and the multifarious duties that went with it.

Mrs. Grant had said that the speeches would be interesting. Becky couldn't help but think, "If they are interesting, I will eat them, word by word." But she had been unprepared for what the Red Cross rally offered. From Bataan and Africa and China, men who had faced the enemy told simply the things that had happened to them. A whisper in the audience would have resounded like a brazen cry. Becky forget herself, the auditorium filled with avid listeners, everyone sitting in the chairs on the platform. She went with the

men who were speaking through every experience, through every suffering and turmoil. And it struck her, at the end of the evening, that none of them had spoken of fear. Perhaps they had felt none; or the job they were doing was greater than their fear. When she left the auditorium that night and took her seat again in the station wagon, she scarcely heard the words that Mrs. Grant spoke for all the officers: "You were fine tonight. We were so proud of you." She remembered them later and was grateful.

"I'm starved," Miss Colt said when they turned into Northampton.

"Let's go to the dog wagon and have a hamburger," Mrs. Grant suggested.

Becky and Buchanan hated to respond as if they hadn't eaten since they joined the Navy, but the mention of food started all sorts of digestive juices to working.

The dog wagon, Becky decided, was really her introduction to the staff. In ten hours she would be an officer, but even then, it would be impossible to feel that she was one of them more than she did munching cheese hamburgers, drinking coffee and exchanging midnight banter with them. It was as if she had passed the first test and come through unscathed. When they left Buchanan and her on the steps of Capen, they left behind them two Midshipmen who already looked upon

themselves as officers, and who held their criterion steady and clear before them. They also left two Midshipmen a little giddy with the excitement of the evening.

Miss Connelly met them at the door when they came in. "I'd like to see you a moment," she said to Becky, and including Buchanan added, "Come on in my room."

Buchanan poked Becky. "What are we going to say?"

"What do you mean?"

"Look at the time. It's twelve-thirty."

"What of it?" Becky replied.

"Plenty."

"Don't be silly. We were acting under orders—well, almost." Becky laughed. "I feel as if we were: the most entertaining we'll have for a long time."

Buchanan shrugged her shoulders, but the shadow of the "tree" that would be posted too late to affect her fell across her face.

"Did you have a good time?" Miss Connelly asked.

"Wonderful," they told her and launched into the details.

Becky knew there was something in the wind. Miss Connelly's whole expression, the way her glance kept settling on her, reminded her of herself when, as a child, she asked her mother to guess which hand held the unexpected present.

"I have something for you," she said at last, looking at Becky as if she might be about to pull out of a hat orders to the Bureau of Personnel in Washington.

She disappeared into her bedroom and came back a few moments later with a jacket. "It's yours," she said, handing it to Becky.

Becky took it automatically. "How did it get down here?" she asked, then her eye fell on the sleeve and the half-stripe that had been added since she last saw it. She looked at Miss Connelly, then at Buchanan. Miss Connelly grinned but Buchanan was struggling with incredulity.

"This isn't mine," Becky said. "It couldn't be. I had one stripe put on it myself today."

"I didn't think it looked very well, so I told them to put on another half-stripe for good measure. It looks much better now, don't you think?"

Becky nodded. It was all she could do.

Buchanan was smiling broadly, at last willing to believe the evidence of her own eyes. "Gee, Becky, leave it here overnight and you'll be a full Lieutenant before morning."

"Well," Miss Connelly said, "I guess you'd better get to bed. May I be the first to salute you?"

"Don't be a fool, McLeod," Becky told herself sternly. "For heaven's sake don't cry." She returned Miss Connelly's salute and then slipped her arm through her fellow-officer's. "What a day this has

been," she said. "What an utterly incredible day! What is the date?"

"Well, it isn't Friday the thirteenth," Miss Connelly said and gave her a gentle shove down the hall.

Becky hung her jacket up where she could see it while she undressed in the closet outside her room. Her mind was in a turmoil. How did she get to be a jg? What on earth had she done to deserve it? Wait till she saw Ann! Then she thought, "Ann's bought me gold bars," and she began to laugh. Laughing broke the tension. She didn't want to cry any more: she was just being amazingly happy.

She took her jacket into her room with her and hoped that Virginia would still be awake. Duffy and Hoffman were breathing heavily in a deep sleep. Virginia hissed at her and sat up, a tousled-haired figure in the moonlight that drenched the room through the open window. Becky went to the side of the bunk, holding the jacket before her.

"Did you have a good time?" Virginia asked.

"Look," Becky said, and held up a sleeve.

Virginia's eyes widened; then she flung her arms around Becky's neck, pinning her against the bunk. "Oh, how wonderful!" she whispered. "Did you know you were going to get it?"

Becky shook her head.

"Miss Connelly came for it after you left," Virginia told her. "She said they hadn't finished with it."

"I don't understand it," Becky said, "but it isn't hard to take."

Virginia laughed softly. "I suppose you'd like us to take everything out of the closet so you can hang it up by itself."

"At once," Becky grinned. "And you can stand guard over it tonight. I have a feeling Miss Connelly will suddenly realize she's made a hideous mistake."

It seemed hours later to Becky when Virginia leaned over the edge of her bunk and said, "Ye gods, you rank her!"

"Rank who?"

"Rank Connelly, you goon."

"Give it to me slowly," Becky said. "I can't get used to ranking anything."

11

ANN WAS waiting for Becky at breakfast mess. She pulled her out of line. "I heard about it last night. Bub, it's wonderful! I couldn't be happier for you."

"How did you hear?" Becky knew in one glance at Ann's broad grin that she meant what she had said.

"Colt told me. How do you feel now?"

"I don't know. I'm numb. Here it is the next day and I'm still a jg."

"I don't see anything odd about that."

"But why me?"

"Why not? You deserve it."

"For what?"

Ann wagged her finger. "The Navy works in mysterious ways."

"You aren't fooling!" Becky laughed.

"Now I suppose you'll get up on that overworked soap-box of yours."

"Wait till you get your stripe, Ann. You'll climb up on it with me."

Ann's face lengthened in a gloomy frown. "It'll be worn out by the time I get my stripe." After a moment her expression brightened in its usual mercurial way. "But I can type twenty-four words a minute now, with only eight mistakes."

Becky looked at her quizzically. "What did you type before?"

"Twelve words with four mistakes."

"But that's the same average, Ann. You've got to stop making mistakes."

Ann looked a little puzzled. "Ye gods! It is. You would figure that out. Now look what you've done to me. First you make me buy you silver bars after I've mortgaged the old homestead to get gold ones for you, and then you quietly blast my illusions. Go on and eat your breakfast."

"Will I see you again before graduation?"

"You're darn right, you will. You don't think I'd miss the pleasure of pinning those bars on you!"

Ann reminded Becky of a theater maid preparing her mistress for a Metropolitan debut. She rustled through the bureau drawers, pulling out underclothes, stockings, shirts.

"What have you been doing all morning, bub?" Ann demanded. "You've only got an hour before graduation. I thought you'd be dressed by now." She strode

out of the room into the closet and came back, bearing the uniform with the stripes.

"I can't wear that!" Becky told her.

"Have they changed their minds?"

"I'm not an officer yet, goon child."

"Doesn't make any sense," Ann grumbled, stalking back to the closet and returning with the unadorned jacket. "You go in a Midshipman and come out a Midshipman. Where does that get you?"

"I can change right after graduation."

"All right. All right," Ann said. Becky realized that Ann was as nervous as if she were not only graduating herself but giving the salutatory. "Get your shirt on. I want to pin the bars on it, and then I'll take your overcoat down and get the stripes put on it. You certainly can't be a jg underneath and a Midshipman on top."

Becky obeyed like a child. It was much simpler than arguing when Ann was in her mother hen mood.

"I probably won't see you again before graduation because I'm going to wait for your coat. But I'll be there, with Company 1." She paused in the doorway. "By the way, have you got your orders yet?"

Becky shook her head. "Virginia's got hers, though. She's going to Procurement in San Francisco. And Hoffman's got hers, too."

"What are they going to do with her? Sit her in a rowboat on the twelve-mile limit to scare the enemy?"

Becky looked around quickly. "Shh, Ann! She might come back."

"I'll bet she's been ready since dawn. She's probably sitting in John M. Greene right now, waiting for things to begin. Well, where's she going?"

"To the Naval Intelligence Office. And you'd better hang onto your hat because she has the highest average in the class—3.9—and she's delivering the Salutatory."

"Leaping Jehosaphat!"

"Makes us look pretty silly, doesn't it?"

Ann shrugged her shoulders. "I still say she'd be more use on the twelve-mile limit."

A tense quietness settled over Company 6 when they mustered at 10:30 in the Capen driveway. Becky realized, with mixed feelings, that this was the last time she would stand before the Company as Commander. Shortly, now, they would scatter across the United States—to the Naval bases, the bureaus, the training stations, the procurement offices. Many of her Company she would never see again, and yet she knew that if she should see them, anywhere in the world, it would be as if she were meeting them on Main Street in Northampton.

As long as they lived, the singleness of the purpose that had brought them together would be a stronger bond than the ordinary ties of friendship. Always, to

say, "I was a Wave," would be among them the key to unquestioning friendship. "I trained at Northampton," would evoke, in addition, such a plethora of memories that the fire would burn low before they were exhausted.

"How incredible," Becky thought, looking at their faces together for the last time, "that these women who came here as individuals, with their individual ideas of the Navy, their separate hopes and expectations and backgrounds, could go out with one common purpose, sublimating so many personalities to a constant ideal." It reminded her of the times she had sat her horse on the field above the Ohio, looking at the broad expanse of the river, its apparently placid, but powerful current, and thought of the smaller rivers lending their force to its power—the Kentucky, the Kanawha, each with its own history and romance. They were like these tributaries that would flow into the endlessly increasing strength that would win the war—all these women in blue who were ready to "hold the Ensign high," remembering the women of other days who had held it high when it was newly won.

* * * * *

They marched into John M. Greene and took their seats in the center of the auditorium. Surreptitious glances stole upward to the balcony. It seemed that

every officer on the station, who was not on the platform, was there.

The Chaplain's eyes swept the rows of seats. When they were filled, he stepped forward, raised his hand and the soft scuffling of feet was silenced. They were going to sing together for the last time.

"Let's have *Waves of the Navy*, first."

Emmy Braddock, sitting at the piano, kept her eyes on him. When he nodded, her fingers moved over the keys in an improvisation of the refrain. "When the war's over," Becky thought, "I'm going to take ten years off and learn to play the piano like that."

"Waves of the Navy
There's a ship sailing down the bay.
And she won't slip into port again
Until the Victory Day.
Carry on for that gallant ship
And for every hero brave
Who will find ashore, his man-sized chore
Was done by a Navy Wave."

Without a pause, half the midshipmen repeated the chorus, half sang *Anchors Aweigh*, harmonizing softly. Becky saw them marching down Sunshine Mountain in a star-lit morning, as they had done so often to the same harmonious tempo.

They sang all their favorites: *A Guy To Tie My*

Tie, Hup, Two, Three, Four, Here Comes The Navy, Ginny the Ninny. Then, as the last note died away, Captain Wood came through a side door on to the platform, with Miss Crandall and Mrs. Grant.

An expectant stillness settled over the hall as they took their seats. Then the Chaplain stepped forward again.

"We will sing *Eternal Father*."

Strong voices lifted the Navy hymn to the farthest row of the gallery. The echo came back like a soft-spoken prayer. Then the Captain rose and spoke to them of Hoffman's record in a class of high averages.

"For this record," he said, "she has been chosen to deliver the Salutatory, in accordance with tradition at this school." Then he called her to the platform.

Becky could scarcely believe that it was Hoffman who stood before them, pledging for all of them the faithful undertaking of their duties; saying farewell to Northampton for the midshipmen so simply and in a voice so moving in its restraint, that every person who heard her sensed the emotion behind her words. Throughout the auditorium the responsive stillness had an electric significance. It was ironical, Becky thought, that Hoffman should be the one to express, as all of them would have done if they could, the deepest feelings and hopes that they held.

When she had finished, she left the platform in a burst of applause that the Captain finally had to still

with raised hand. But the pride in his eyes and his smile were as eloquent as their applause.

He stepped before the lectern. For a moment his eyes swept the blue-clad Midshipmen. In his hand he held a long sheet of paper. "It is usually my custom," he said, "to give a few parting words of advice to the graduates. In the Navy when a ship or a force sets out, it receives its sailing orders. Each unit has its own assigned objective, and looking upon you as a task force, I am going to give you your sailing orders." He raised the paper in his hand and read:

Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (WR)
Northampton, Massachusetts,
March 2, 1943.

Operation Order
No. 6

TASK ORGANIZATION.

- (a) *Communication Duty Force*
207 WAVES and 10 SPARS from Company 2.
 - (b) *General Duty Force.*
163 WAVES from Companies 2, 3 and 6.
 - (c) *Supplies & Accounts Duty Force, RADCLIFFE Detachment.*
Capen Group, 69 WAVES from Company 6.
Northrop-Gillett Group, 66 WAVES from Companies 2 and 3.
1. *Mission.* To accomplish the relief, by properly trained officers of the Women's Reserve, of 515 male officers in the Shore Establishment of the Navy, in order that those officers may be available for sea duty in the Fleet.

Information. The expanding Fleet of the U. S. Navy is in urgent need of the services at sea of all officers qualified for duty afloat. The present number of actual vacancies in the Fleet is critical.

Assumptions. That WAVES sent to duty under previous Operation orders have performed their duties extremely well, and established high expectations which this Force will have to meet. That male prejudice of the traditional type will be met. Saluting will be critical. That glamour, wile, sex, and leaning tactics will not be used by the Force. . . .

A burst of laughter from the class interrupted him.

"That no fundamental reason exists why women cannot perform the tasks assigned in this Order as well as, or better than, men.

2. *General Task.* This Force will proceed with despatch and confidence to carry out the individual orders about to be received and take over the shore jobs now performed by men, by

(a), during Phase I, quietly learning your new assignments, and making no effort to reform, change or suggest until you fully understand the organization and methods of your new stations and your own assigned responsibilities.

(b), during Phase II, after you have become in all respects as capable and reliable in your jobs as the men you relieve, you will expand to your fullest efforts and do those jobs better than anyone has ever done them before.

3. *Separate Tasks.*

(a) *Communication Duty Force*, during Phase I, will slip quietly into the issuing rooms, various offices and special stations. Apply yourselves to the special conditions you will find. It is a peculiarity of Naval Communications that each

station has its own interpretation of Communications Instructions and procedure. You will master the particular way of your new station; and postpone decision, during this Phase, as to whether that is the way you were taught at Northampton. During Phase II, increase the speed and reliability of Naval Communications. During this Phase you will encounter high expectations established by the performance of your predecessors of the Women's Reserve in Naval Communications. You will find it already established that women are as well adapted to Communications duty as men are. Therefore a performance equal to that of men is only your starting point. Credit does not begin until expectation is exceeded. You are the largest group in the Women's Reserve performing one type of duty; the success of the Women's Reserve as a whole rests upon you in that proportion.

(b) *General Duty Force*, during Phase I, will be distributed to a wide variety of assignments. You will proceed cautiously to your destinations through a fog called "Why didn't they teach me this at Northampton?" and a mist labelled "I didn't dream I'd have to do this!"

The laughter of the class swept the hall. The Captain knew his officers.

"During Phase II, you will reach your destinations regardless of heavy weather. During this Phase your growing amazement at the wide variety of things you will have to do will only be exceeded by the amazement of your seniors at how well you can do them. Certain units of this force will meet with great difficulty and surprise. If you become scattered and confused, use this rallying cry, "Whatever it is, if *he* can do it, *I* can." The end of Phase II will begin when your confidence begins to exceed your perplexity.

(c) *Supplies & Accounts Duty Force*, during Phase I, will attend the Naval Supply School at Radcliffe College for

instruction in their specialty. You will have completed your Naval indoctrination at Northampton but you will keep quiet about this and let the Naval command at Radcliffe find it out. The Capen Group, having had two months' indoctrination, will share their greater knowledge, if any, with the Northrop-Gillett Group, which has had only one month, in order to improve the latter group, if needed, and raise the standard of the product which this school delivers to Radcliffe.

The reception of the last remark by the Northrop-Gillett Group was warm and delighted.

(x) *General Instructions Applicable To All Forces.*

Upon reporting to your new stations the authority of this command ceases; but our obligation to you for the soundness of the foundation we together have laid, and yours to us that you build a firm structure of detailed knowledge on that foundation, will continue. Communication in regard to loose stones in the foundation or stones that should have been installed but were not, will be appreciated. The quality of the cement that holds those stones together, the lasting quality of that cement, is your individual responsibility.

4. *Logistic Support.* Ships leaving this base will be fueled only with basic knowledge and method of approach. . . ."

Ann's laughter rose above the general roar at this subtly veiled warning.

"Completion of stores with specific facts will be accomplished at field bases. This station is prepared to forward only that tangible substance known as advice. This is available in two classes:

Class B, Generalization and encouragement. Available in unlimited quantities to replenish morale. If properly stocked when you sail, you should not require any of this com-

modity. Class A, Advice specific to your problem and the realization on our part that our hopes can only be realized through your success. Supply limited, but we shall give all we have as we follow your progress and achievements with deep interest, sympathy and VERY best wishes.

5. *Communications. Phases. Rendezvous.* Phase I begins when you leave this building. Phase II begins when you feel that you really know what you are doing. Rendezvous: A. Northampton, If broken down and in need of repair; B. Detail Office, BuPers, for larger assignments when this order is accomplished; C. OVERSEAS, by the grace and permission of Congress.

/s/ Captain A.B.C.

Commanding Officer of the Building Yard.

DISTRIBUTION LIST: Graduates of March 2nd Class
All Staff Members.

When he finished speaking, the Captain faced a roar of applause that was obviously deeply moving to him. He had felt that the orders were symbolic; to the graduates, they were orders that would guide them through the early, confusing days of their first billets. It was several minutes before the last echo faded and he was able to speak again:

"Will you stand and raise your right hands."

The class stood and repeated, after him, the solemn oath, and then he spoke the words that were as thrilling to Becky as the words of Lieutenant Miller when they were sworn in as Midshipmen.

"Congratulations, Officers."

Suddenly, excited whispers broke the tension.

The Captain raised his hand and smiled, understanding their emotion in the greatest moment of an incomparable six weeks.

"Owing to the large number of graduates from this school, it has been the practice to deliver orders to the Platoon leaders as representatives of the class."

He read out the names of the Platoon leaders, and they came up the steps to the platform. To everyone he spoke and handed orders and then they passed down the steps on the far side, to take their places among their fellow-officers.

In the gallery a flashbulb exploded suddenly. The class looked around. Becky caught Miss Lawrence's eyes and waved. When Miss Lawrence waved back, a sea of gloved hands responded in a gesture of farewell to all the staff. The never-to-be-forgotten ceremony was over. Row by row the new officers filed out into the chilly air of the March day.

Someone grasped Becky's arm as she came through the doorway. She turned and looked up into Sam's face. He was smiling rather sheepishly.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?" she cried.

"I didn't know you wanted me. You might have had other friends."

"But I didn't think there was a chance of your coming in the middle of the week."

"There wouldn't have been ordinarily. Anyhow, congratulations, Lieutenant. Those stripes look mighty good."

"They were certainly a surprise packet for me," she told him. "Come on back to Capen. I want to hear all about you."

"I'd like to tell you about me a little more privately than this—is there anywhere—could we have lunch together?"

"We can have lunch right across the street, at the White House."

Ann passed them, came to a halt and saluted. Becky laughed as she and Sam returned the salute. "Ann!"

"Not a word, Lieutenant," Ann said, "until you pay me my buck."

"What buck?"

"The dollar you owe me. I've been watching like a hawk, and I know I'm the first to salute you."

Becky paid. "Now, will you allow me to introduce you to Lieutenant Wilding?"

Ann allowed it and looked long and steadily at Sam as they shook hands. When her glance returned to Becky it held approval of what she had seen.

"I've got to run along. Will I see you later?" she asked.

"At the Hotel?"

"No such luck. I'll be in the typing room at Northrop. I will always be in the typing room at Northrop."

"I've gotten orders, Becky," Sam said, and something in his voice made her look up quickly.

"Where to?"

"North Africa."

"Oh Sam—when?"

"That I can't say. But this is the last time I'll see you for many a moon."

She found herself speechless for several moments. "Are you glad?" she asked at last.

He nodded and turned his head toward the window, to gaze unseeingly at the leafless branches of an elm. "I'm very glad. I realize now how long I've wanted it; how often I've watched the door, waiting to see my relief come in."

She looked at his clean, hard profile and saw him suddenly in a new light. She felt as if she had awakened from a confusing dream to the comforting knowledge of reality.

He turned from the window and met her eyes. "I guess you know what I'd like to ask you, but I'm not going to."

"You needn't ask me, Sam. I will. The day you come home."

They walked slowly back to Capen. Becky wished the house were on top of the farthest mountain. There was so much to say and it was so futile to begin in the time that was left to them.

They stopped at the foot of Capen steps. "I'll leave you here," Sam said. "I know you've got lots to do and my train leaves in half an hour. I'd like to remember you standing here, just like this."

For the second time, she watched him go down the street, the brittle hedges finally blotting him from her view, and when she turned and walked slowly up the steps, a wild prayer was hammering at her heart.

Miss Connelly called to her from her office. "You don't look very happy, Lieutenant. I thought you'd be smiling all over your face."

"Oh, but I am," Becky said. "Terribly happy—and a little dazed."

Miss Connelly nodded wisely. "Well, your orders have come." She handed them to Becky and watched her as she read them.

From:	Chief of Naval Personnel
To:	Lieutenant (jg) Rebecca McLeod, USNR
Via:	Commanding Officer.
Subject:	Assignment to duty.

1. When directed by your commanding officer you will regard yourself detached from the Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School (WR), Northampton, Massachusetts, and will proceed to Norfolk, Virginia and re-

port to the Commandant, 5th Naval District, for duty in the office of the Commandant to relieve Lieutenant (jg) Richard Bates.

Randall Jacobs

Becky read the orders twice before she looked up. Miss Connelly was sailing.

"That's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

"Exactly," Becky said. She wondered if Lieutenant Richard Bates would be waiting for her as eagerly as Sam had awaited his relief—Lieutenant Bates who could go gratefully to sea, at last.

